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LOYALTY GEORGE

BY

MRS. PARR

AUTHOR OF

'ADAM AND EVE,' 'DOROTHY FOX,' ETC.

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LOYALTY GEORGE

CHAPTER I

OVER one of the many villages lying sheltered behind that bold line of coast which marks the entrance to Plymouth Haven, the moon was slowly rising. Already she had climbed the first hill, and soon, sailing along in all the glory of her fulness, she would flood with light the sharp spine of cliff midway on which a girl was standing.

For an hour or more she had stood there watching, her eager gaze thrown down on the line of small cottages which fringes the half lake, half river, formed by the mingling of the Yealm with the in-running tide from the sea.

With varying emotions she constantly changed her position, always mindful not to take her eyes off the window of the house opposite to her, the red curtains of which sent out such a comfortable glow.

'He must be come,' she kept repeating, 'because

of her sittin' in the parlour there. Is it that she's waitin'?'

The doubt seemed to suggest some different plan of action. She stepped down from the jutting stone on which she had been poising, and stood irresolute. But only for a minute; the next she had sprung again into the old position, and stretching out her arms before her, 'Roger!' she cried, this time aloud; 'oh, Roger!' and then she remained breathless, motionless, for the house-door had opened, and a ray of light had been sent out, and only that a cloud obscured the moon she could have seen who was there. 'Perhaps—it might be!'—the bare supposition made her madly-beating heart leap into her throat — but no, all was again clear, and not a creature to be seen. Whoever had opened the door was, seemingly, still in the house.

Further suspense became intolerable, and with a cry, half of rage, half of despair, like the wild untutored creature she was, Loyalty George ran along the crest of the hill, and then plunged down into the dark wooded thicket which led to the river below.

All day long Loyalty's every sense, nerve, emotion had been on the strain. She had been hoping, fearing, waiting, watching for one who had not come. Sick with anxiety to see him again, she had cheated herself into the belief that he must share this feeling, and now there was the revulsion—the crushing certainty that he was at home, but had not sought her. A different nature, or perchance hers if nurtured

more tenderly, would have sought refuge in tears, instead of which an evil spirit seemed to draw near to her, and threaten her with that dark mood which nothing but movement could keep under. She must go somewhere, run madly along the cliffs, scale the rocks, fling herself into danger. In her mind's eye she saw the exact spot where she would wish to be —a mound of green that jutted out midway up a cliff overhanging the sea. To tempt you down, shelf after shelf of thick slate formed a ladder on the sharpened angle of the rock, the surface riddled by the nests of birds who would not breed in any other spot along the coast. There, years ago, when little more than a mere child, she had saved Roger's life. Had it not been for what she had done then, he would not be living now. Did not that give her a right to him? Roger had as much as said so. It was his favourite spot, that cliff; whenever he was most kind he took her there. It was there he had said good-bye to her; there they had parted; and the remembrance of that parting seemed to quicken afresh her sense of power. Yes, it was there she would go; and, as if her body had forestalled this decision, already she was making her way to the ferry which has to be crossed before the corresponding coast can be reached, whose continuous line is broken by the entrance-mouth of the Yealm River.

The slip which runs down to the edge of the water is conveniently marked by a projecting stone, on to which Loyalty brought herself by her final bound;

and, hardly pausing to recover breath, she hollowed the palms of her two hands, and putting them one on each side of her mouth, shouted 'Over.'

Her head was bent forward to listen for an answer, but not a sound came. 'Over, over, over!' she repeated, her clear fresh voice ringing through the stillness, but no reply.

'He's that side,' she said, running down among the mud-covered stones and peering about to discover if anything in the shape of a boat lay hidden, drawn up under the overhanging bushes. 'Why for ever can't he hear, or else give it up? 'tain't no good his goin' on like this, and he gettin' ever so much more deaf. Over, over, over!' she repeated, with rising voice; and then, finding no effect produced, she put two of her fingers into her mouth, and by their aid sent out a peculiar shrill whistle. 'If that don't fetch him,' she said, 'I'm done'; and this time she bent almost to the ground, with her ear so placed that it might catch the faintest sound. Some minutes passed without her moving; gradually a smile spread over her face, the dip of oars was heard, she gave a sigh of satisfaction. 'It's all right, he's coming;' and sitting with arms clasped round her knees, she waited.

'Why, Dunchy,' she said, springing into the boat before it had well touched the shore, 'I thought you was dead.'

'Iss, I reckon;' and then, seeing who his passenger was, he exclaimed, in a tone softened from

its gruffness, 'Awh; you, is it? Why, what be you doin' abroad to this hour?'

'Tired o' my own company, so I comed to see you and hear the news. What's goin' on, eh?'

'Why, us is, if I gets a chance at handlin' the oars. No, no, now; you sot down; I'll row 'ee. 'Sides, I can see 'ee then, and make out what you says to me. 'Tis terrible bad to be hard o' hearin', 'tis.'

Loyalty nodded her head in sympathy.

'It don't so much matter with the ferry,' added the old man philosophically, 'cos folks is bound to scritch and holler anyways, whether you'm deaf or no; but with speakin' 'tis a bad job.'

Loyalty assented with another nod given more impatiently.

'Who have you seed to-day?' she asked, without giving Dunchy time for further digression.

'Seed?' said the old fellow, with feigned stolidity; 'why, I've seed you, ha'n't I? That's enuf for any raisonable man.'

Loyalty gave her shoulders a twist which betrayed her irritability.

'No, now; you know what I means. Tell me, has *he* come?' And she leaned forward as if in her anxiety she would pluck the answer from the old man's mouth.

'Who am I to rade for "he"?'

'Roger,' she answered fiercely.

'Awh! Roger, is it? Iss, if that's who you manes, he's come.'

'He is?' The words came out with a sob, half laughing, half crying. 'Did you see him? Oh, Dunchy, where? Did you speak to him? Tell me all about it. When did he come?'

'Do 'ee want all the questions answered to wance, or will wan at a time do for 'ee?' asked Dunchy, apparently bent upon teasing her. 'Howsomdever, 'twas this afternoon he reached.'

'Not in the mornin', then?'

'Don't I tell 'ee in the afternoon. Sommut betwixt three and four I gived Tom Ravens a shove down, and he'd just a parted with Roger on top o' hill there; so I marked the time.'

'And was he then goin' home—to his mother's, I mean?'

'Well, where else should he go, if pace and quietness was to reign? *Home!* Iss, o' course he went *home;* and he's home now, my maid, and there he'll stop, too.'

Loyalty heaved an impatient sigh.

'Dunchy, you hates the old woman, don't 'ee? Say so; tell me you does.'

'Wa-al, I can't say us is nuts upon wan another, her and me. And if I was a maid, and a handsome maid too, I'd see her blazed afore I'd worry myself 'bout any man child as ever she bore. I don't say nothin' agen Roger, but if he was Port Admiral, bein' *you,* I wouldn't think nothin' about he.'

'And why—for what reason?'

''Cos you and they baint o' the same kidney.

Now, 'tis no good your takin' it ill '—for Loyalty's clouded face betrayed her displeasure—' you know it so well as I do. Look how high they carries their heads. What a deal folks think on 'em. Nobody could never say either wan o' they ever did anythink they was ashamed of.'

The girl pressed her hand against herself, as if every word Dunchy said sent a stab through her.

'I don't see that that makes no difference,' she said moodily.

'No, that's just where 'tis; but they do; and so you take my advice, and don't you think nothin' more 'bout he. Lors a massy! why should 'ee? Haven't 'ee got sweethearts enough to satisfy 'ee, and five or six on 'em fightin' and swearin' and cussin' and quarrellin' if wan gets so much as a look more than the other do? Blame the maid! You'm hard to plaze, you be. Why, for miles around there ain't, so far as good looks, another to fellow 'ee. You'm talked of as a beauty so far away as Plymouth Dock, and our Sam says a Torbay man who was round here had heard tell of 'ee; so what cause you've got to ream your heart out about one who don't cast a second thought on you altogether beats me.'

'Who says he don't cast a second thought on me?' she asked passionately.

'Why, I says so; no more he don't—not as regards matrimony. Hush, now,' he added, seeing she was about to argue. 'I mayn't be so sharp with

my ears as some be, but I's got two eyes in my head that was gived to me to see, and she don't take me in, the old woman over there. Don't I see what she's after, and who she's pitched on, too, for her darter ?'

'Phœbe Rowe—I know,' said Loyalty sullenly; 'and you think Roger 'll care more for her than for me.'

'I never said that; but he'll marry her, you'll see.'

Loyalty's head drooped.

'There's a bit o' money,' continued Dunchy; 'and Lucas Rowe, her father, has scraped a goodish business together. That's what 'tis the old woman looks to; her's got her eye upon the rhino.'

Loyalty seemed to draw up from the depths of her heart a sigh.

'Oh, Dunchy!' she cried, her face quivering with pent-up emotion, 'if you was young, tell me, wouldn't you rather marry me ?'

'Iss,' and he laughed softly, 'I should rather think I wud. But, there,' he hastened to add apologetically, 'there was never nothin' respectable about me; I was allays wan o' your own sort. I don't mane to say I'd got a father as was hung, but I'd got wan as deserved to be.'

Loyalty did not utter a word, and Dunchy, innocent that he had dealt a deeper stab to her, as innocently prepared for the wound a plaster.

'Phœbe Rowe!' he cried, after a minute's reflection, 'marry she! Now, I tell 'ee what 'tis: ole

chap as I be, hard a hearin', and all that, I wudn't be jined in wedlock with that maid o' Rowe's not for all the money you could pay me! There, now; and that's the truth, and no lie!'

The girl raised her eyes and fixed them on him, while Dunchy continued—

'Stuck-up, stand-off consarn, who be she, I wonders? With her,—every time I has a bit o' fish to carry up there,—"Keep on the mat;" "Clane yer feet;" "Don't sot yer barsket down;" be'—and Dunchy consigned the offender to a very warm atmosphere—'to her! Wait till she's past seventy and more, and's a got to box the compass round with a maun o' fish fit to weigh down a hoss's back, Lord help her!'

The lips which Loyalty had set tight gradually parted asunder, showing two rows of little pearly teeth. She laughed softly, and Dunchy laughed back at her.

'Ah!'—and he nodded his head admiringly—'she'll never be the one to aise a pore sowl of his burden, and catch up the barsket, and run with 'n to the top of the hill. I knows! Don't 'ee think to desave me pretendin' 'tis a trick, and that you just wants to feel the heft of it. You'm kindly to all that's weakly and old, my maid, and th' Almighty 'ull reward ye for it.'

'How?' she said.

'Well, that I can't tell exactly; but somehows somethin' you'm wantin' for, He'll give to 'ee.'

She was stepping on the thwarts—for they had

reached the opposite side—and passing Dunchy as she got out, she put her arms round his neck, bent down her mouth to his ear, and whispered into it—

'Roger—ask for his love to be gived to me. I don't want nothin' more;' and with one spring she had cleared the boat, and was scrambling up the grassy slope, leaving the old man looking at her.

'Here,' he called, suddenly recollecting himself, 'how long are you a-goin' to be?'

But though Loyalty heard and turned her head, she gave him no answer.

'Hum! that's what 'tis roamin' and rangin' over them clifts half the night through; some mischief 'ull come of it wan day. I'll tell her I means to wait, p'r'aps that 'll 'tice her back agen. I'm goin' to stop,' he shouted; 'do 'ee hear? I'm 'bidin' over this side. The longer you keeps me, the shorter time I gets for my bed, remember.' And, drawing up his boat into a somewhat securer position, he curled himself up and lay down in its bow, where he was soon sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER II

WHILE Loyalty had been keeping her watch and crossing the ferry, the man who engrossed her thoughts was sitting with his mother. It was two years since Mrs. Coode had seen her son, and her

eyes scanned every line of his face with maternal devotion.

'You've aged, Roger, it seems to me;' and she raised her spectacles to regard him more critically. 'You haven't had no illness nor nothin' while you've been away, have ye?'

'Not I;' and Roger brisked himself up, as one does who is conscious of feeling languid and dreamy; 'but I reckon I've only got my sea legs as yet, and the walk here's took it out of me. 'Twas hot along them cliffs, and no mistake; the sun fairly beat down;' and, as if in remembrance of its power, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead with it.

'Oh, if that's all, a cup o' tea 'll soon set 'ee straight;' and she got up, preparing to make it. 'Only to think now of its bein' so hot up alongs; we haven't felt nothin' like it down here.'

'Well, you lies so sheltered from the heat and the cold too.'

'True, 'tis a capital situation in that respect; you'd be hard put to it, I b'lieve, to find a better.'

'A better! if there's its equal I should like to know! Not that every house in Ferrers'—and Roger let his eyes roam round with pride—'is a match for yours, mother.'

Mrs. Coode's gratified heart swelled.

'I've allays tried to keep a respectable home, Roger. What I've got about me is plain, but it's good. I worked for it all with my own hands, and

didn't buy nothin' till the money was there to pay for it.'

Roger looked at her admiringly.

'Ah, you've been a wonderful woman, mother,' he said.

'No'—and Mrs. Coode shook her head as if to disown the distinction—'I don't claim to be called that; but I do say that, bein' left a widow with a child to maintain—for you was not but four year old when your father died—I never asked so much as the parin' o' my nail from anybody. Many's the time, after stitchin' all day, I've sot up half the night washin' my clothes and cleanin' the house, that all might look tidy and decent; and, thank the Lord, there's not a soul livin' who, if they spoke the truth, could ever say they saw you with a tored garment on or one that was dirty.'

Roger laughed. 'I mind now,' he said, 'how you used to lather and scrub me.'

Mrs. Coode laughed in her turn. 'And if I did, you paid me for my labour. For though I, as your own mother, says so, there wasn't a boy in the whole place fit to name in the same day with you. I used to ask myself whether 'twas altogether right to take the pride I did in your looks; and then, as to learnin'! why, you'd have a thing off by heart before another knew the first line of it.'

Roger chuckled again.

'I was a wonderful fellow, I was; a chap 'ud have to be one of the two that come home in the three

ships to equal me. Ah! what a thousand pities 'tis the maidens don't look at men with mothers' eyes; there wouldn't be such scrimmages in matrimony if so.'

'No, now, that's not the cause at all'—and Mrs. Coode spoke decidedly—'no more is it any good lyin' all the blame on the women to bear. If sons would be guided by their parents, and ask the direction of Providence, there'd be another tale to tell; but 'tis men takes their own unbridled wills: that's the rock they splits on.'

Her manner, more excited, warned Roger that they were touching dangerous ground, from which, anxious to withdraw, he rather maladroitly put the question: 'Speakin' o' marriage minds me of the maidens about here. How are they gettin' on? Who's gone away? who's married? who's dead?'

'Oh, there's very little alterations. One or two's got married, and one or two's gone from the place; but of them you knew I fancy you'll find 'em pretty much as you left 'em.'

'Phœbe Rowe—what's become o' she?'

'Why, her was down here not above a hour before you came in. She heard you was comin' to-day, and knew I should be fidgety cos you wasn't come; so, so soon as ever her father got back and told up about the payin' off not bein' over, she ran down to put my mind at ease.'

'Now that's what I call kind.'

'Oh, that's Phœbe all over, more 'specially with

me; nothin's too hot or too heavy that I may want of her. I don't know what I should ha' done at times while you've been away if 't hadn't been for that girl, for I ain't so young as I was, Roger. My span of life can't be long! I feel the years roll round with me.'

'Stuff and nonsense! don't talk like that; why, you're good yet for twenty year to come.'

Mrs. Coode shook her head.

'Don't speak presumptuous,' she said reprovingly. 'I'm not wishin' to be gone, but, thank the Lord, He'll find me prepared when 'tis appointed that my time's come.'

'I heerd say that old Rowe is makin' of his buildin'-yard a pretty payin' consarn,' said Roger, wishing to broach another subject.

'Wonderful,' replied Mrs. Coode emphatically; 'lot's o' the gentry round has lent him a helpin' hand. The way he's got on is most surprisin'.'

'H'm! Just the luck of his sort, lickspittle, cap-in-hand;' and Roger twisted his face as if the recollection of the fortunate Rowe disagreed with him.

'Well, none of us, you know, fashioned ourselves, and I b'lieve 'tis more his manner than any meanin' he's got with it. He thinks a wonderful deal about you; he's always wantin' to know "what about Roger."'

Roger was evidently not disposed to appreciate the compliment, and Mrs. Coode continued: 'I fancies he feels it, not havin' no son, for the business

has got beyond one pair o' eyes lookin' after it. 'Twill be a capital job for whoever takes a fancy to Phœbe, and so Miss Anne was sayin'.'

'Oh! and how is she?' said Roger heartily, entirely ignoring Phœbe and her fortune.

'Miss Anne, do 'ee mean?'—Mrs. Coode's thin lips were drawn a trifle closer—'Miss Anne's well enough; leastways she was when last I see her. She's been away stayin' to London, but she's back agin home now.'

The meal of which they had been partaking over, Mrs. Coode rose to clear the things away. In Roger's honour they had been sitting in the parlour, where, in spite of the heat he had complained of, a bright fire was burning. The month was September, and though for several days past during a few hours the sun had blazed out fiercely, directly it had sunk to rest the evenings were chilly.

'Draw the blind down and pull the curtain across, Roger, do,' called the mother from the little kitchen. 'We'll light the candle when I come in, for it's grown too dark to see. I don't know, I declare, what you means by its bein' so warm; 't 'as turned quite cold, seems to me.'

'Not a bit of it. I was thinking of havin' a pipe outside, and takin' a bit of a turn.'

'No, no, now, 'bide where you be; 'tis hard if yer own mother can't have 'ee to herself the first evenin' you'm home, after over two years away, too. 'Sides, there's no cause for goin' out to smoke. Smoke

'longside the fire, 'twill do me good to see 'ee there, for many's the anxious hour I've spent, knowin' you was on the sea. You'm all I've got, Roger, and I humbly thank the Lord for sendin' 'ee back to me.'

Without another word Roger sat down; and only that his fingers drummed with nervous quickness on his knees, no one could have told but that he remained willingly. He had the strongest filial affection for this mother of whom he felt so proud, and never as boy or man had he willingly acted in direct opposition to her wishes or commands. The tea-things set aside to be washed in proper order, Mrs. Coode returned to the little parlour with her knitting in her hand; the sight of her son sitting there, as, often in his absence, she had pictured him, made her eyes grow dim—but the tears she brushed away were tears of pleasure, which only softened her voice as she asked:

'What is it you're lookin' after, my son?—a spill o' paper? Here's one.'

'I fancied somethin' was amiss with my pipe,' said Roger, desirous of turning his face away from her, 'but I believe it's right enough after all,' and he made an unnecessary fuss in lighting it, noisily sucking to make it draw; then, abruptly, his face still turned away, he said: 'You haven't said nothin' about old Jake George, nor Loyalty, mother.'

'Haven't I?' replied Mrs. Coode coolly.

'You've seen her, haven't you?'

'If you mean since you've been away have I seed

her, why yes, certainly.' There was a little pause, and Mrs. Coode continued: 'I can't for the minute recall exactly when it was, but I know the place was outside Hockaday's; and to speak plain, Roger, I turned my head the other ways.'

'D—— this pipe!' said Roger, getting up angrily; 'I thought it wouldn't draw.'

Mrs. Coode looked amazed; it was most unusual for her son to swear, and if ever any word of the kind slipped out in his mother's hearing he had always made some excuse to her.

'What took her up to Hockaday's?' he asked, seemingly unmindful of the usual apology. 'I thought, mother, when I went away you talked of keepin' your eye upon her?'

'And what I talked of, Roger, I acted on. I barely let a week go by before I went down to that pigsty of a place—for I can't call it no better—that they lives in, and I then and there made her the offer that if she'd come across to me of evenin's, any she liked to name, I'd teach her to sew to her needle, and put her in the way of doin' things; moreover, that she should go with me to a place o' worship—that is, if she chose to dress herself decent.'

'Well?'

'Yes, but 'twasn't well, nor in any ways what Loyalty wanted. She's glib enough with her tongue—'tis "Yes, Mrs. Coode," and "Thank you, Mrs. Coode," that's to my face; but my back turned,

and the next I'm told is her conduct's most disgraceful.'

Roger's face clouded visibly.

'I told you when I first spoke, mother, that you'd need all yer patience with her; I know the bringin' up she's had; still, on my side there's a debt o' gratitude owin', and it seemed to me if you took her in hand to make her more womanly, it would be like wipin' out the score a bit.'

'I ain't in no ways ungrateful to her, Roger—you mustn't say that, for if I was to live to a hundred that she saved your life won't never be forgot by me; but at the same time I've always held myself respectable, and more especial as to the company I kept, so that to ask me to mix myself up with a girl who's heard singin' in a public-house, and makes free with a parcel o' low smugglin' fellows is, at my time o' life, to say the least of it, somethin' new to me.'

Roger sat silent, and Mrs. Coode continued: 'I can't see what call there is for me to mystify anythink. Loyalty isn't no more to you than she is to me, except 'tis in the wish to do her benefit;' and the mother stole a furtive look at her son, throwing into her words the tone of an inquiry.

'I told you exactly how I looked 'pon her,' said Roger coldly, 'before I went away.'

'Yes, I know'—Mrs. Coode's voice sounded more conciliatory—'and believe me, Roger, 'tis the truth I speak when I say I haven't gived her up without a

trial; but you know me for what I am; when 'tis my duty I can't be bound down in my speech. Why, I could no more have had Loyalty up here and, knowin' what I'd been told, not have spoke a warnin' word ag'inst her goin's on with Wakeham, and the young Hockaday, and that good-for-nothin' brother of Liza Stevenson's, than—I could ha' flied. Then there's her style o' dressin'—well, now, you shall hear——'

But instead of listening, Roger impatiently interrupted her.

'Tish, let her be,' he said angrily. 'What's the good of wastin' time and breath on such a young hussey? She's fit for the company she keeps, and the crew she belongs to, and I was a fool for my pains to try and think to make anythin' better of her.' And he finished by flinging about several not very choice oaths.

Mrs. Coode sat in mute astonishment. Could it be her Roger—her model son—who was talking in this way?

'Hush, hush, Roger!' she said, 'my dear! Why, I never heard you use such language as this before. I'm terrified at it, I am.'

With an effort Roger got himself in hand again.

'Come, mother,' he said, with an attempt to laugh, 'remember in what rough company I've been. I'll promise better behaviour after to-night. You'll see I won't break out again; I shouldn't have now, only —but never mind, that'll do. The least said the

and the next I'm told is her conduct's most disgraceful.'

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Roger sat silent, and Mrs. Coode continued: 'I can't see what call there is for me to mystify anythink. Loyalty isn't no more to you than she is to me, except 'tis in the wish to do her benefit;' and the mother stole a furtive look at her son, throwing into her words the tone of an inquiry.

'I told you exactly how I looked 'pon her,' said Roger coldly, 'before I went away.'

'Yes, I know'—Mrs. Coode's voice sounded more conciliatory—'and believe me, Roger, 'tis the truth I speak when I say I haven't gived her up without a

trial; but you know me for what I am; when 'tis my duty I can't be bound down in my speech. Why, I could no more have had Loyalty up here and, knowin' what I'd been told, not have spoke a warnin' word ag'inst her goin's on with Wakeham, and the young Hockaday, and that good-for-nothin' brother of Liza Stevenson's, than—I could ha' flied. Then there's her style o' dressin'—well, now, you shall hear——'

But instead of listening, Roger impatiently interrupted her.

'Tish, let her be,' he said angrily. 'What's the good of wastin' time and breath on such a young hussey? She's fit for the company she keeps, and the crew she belongs to, and I was a fool for my pains to try and think to make anythin' better of her.' And he finished by flinging about several not very choice oaths.

Mrs. Coode sat in mute astonishment. Could it be her Roger—her model son—who was talking in this way?

'Hush, hush, Roger!' she said, 'my dear! Why, I never heard you use such language as this before. I'm terrified at it, I am.'

With an effort Roger got himself in hand again.

'Come, mother,' he said, with an attempt to laugh, 'remember in what rough company I've been. I'll promise better behaviour after to-night. You'll see I won't break out again; I shouldn't have now, only —but never mind, that'll do. The least said the

spoiling by over-indulgence the boy whom she regarded as her sole earthly blessing. Her husband, a gay, reckless sailor, had perished with his ship at sea; and though Mrs. Coode would never have confessed that she had made a mistake in marrying him, she saw, as years went on, the hand of Providence in removing the example of such a parent from her boy.

Respectability — the keeping yourself up — not being beholden to anybody—had through life been the god of Mrs. Coode's worship, and it was the religion in which she instructed her son. Late and early she had toiled for her own and her child's living, stretching to a sin the satisfaction that he owed everything to his mother, from the day of his birth to now that he had grown a man.

Naturally, it being the calling of all the men about, Roger had taken to the sea; but not until two years since had he been a King's sailor, and then, without that usual consultation with his mother which preceded all his actions, he had gone to Plymouth and offered himself for one of the crew of a ship fitting out there.

It was in keeping with Mrs. Coode's character that, when told by her son what he had done, she did not question his decision; neither, apparently, did she seek into the motive for it, although the suspicion of what that motive was stung her to the quick.

'"If your right hand offend thee cut it off, and

cast it from thee,"' she said, meditating to herself on the event, '"and your eye, pluck it out"; so that, if feelin' if he stops here the flesh is too weak to obey, oughtn't I to give thanks to th' Almighty, that has granted him strength to go right out o' sight of her?'

And the mother had judged her son correctly. Roger had suddenly become conscious of his weakness; the girl, who for years had followed him with the slavish devotion of a dog, seemed by a miracle transformed into a woman, and a woman who held him at her mercy.

What a struggle had begun then! How he had fought to set himself free! But his love was like the waves of the ocean; if at times it receded, it was only to dash back again with greater strength than before. Why, why had Providence sent him this trial? Was it because when as a lad he had seen the child oppressed, he had protected her?—when he had heard her hounded and called after, he had fought for her?—and later, when grown almost a man, in a spirit of over-venturesomeness, because he would not give in, and be beaten by a bird trying to defend her young, he had climbed down the cliff side to a point where too late he saw his danger, had she not risked, nay, all but given her life to save him?

After that was it strange, then, that he felt a gratitude towards her? It was true that all that while she was growing up; but how was he to

know?—he who had never had any feeling of the sort towards any girl before.

Poor Roger! Seeing the surroundings of her he loved, knowing the black tragedy of her father's fate, which pointed every finger in scorn at her, was it possible he could lead this girl to his mother and say, 'She it is I have chosen to be your daughter'?

Before, then, it was too late—before she knew—before she had dragged anything from his lips, he must go, must leave her; and one day, when sense and reason had the upper hand, he had rushed to the port some six or seven miles away and joined the *Apollo*, outward bound for the East Indies.

His fate settled, his absence for some years secured, his mother told, the climax he dreaded was in more danger of coming to pass than it had ever been before.

The sight of Loyalty drowned in tears—her grief, her despair, the abandonment with which she spoke her love—oh, it was heaven to him; a happiness which he hadn't strength to resist, if he did not permit himself full license to enjoy.

Under the plea of taking her to task, giving her advice, extracting promises of amendment and improvement, he passed much of the little leave he got in her company; and the girl, full of impassioned love, little heeded what occasion brought him, so that while he remained she could have him near her.

Not until the hour of parting came did Roger fully recognise his error; and then, full of compunc-

tion, and with a hope as slender as the clinging to a straw, he proffered his petition to his mother, asking her, out of gratitude for the life he owed to Loyalty's saving, to look after the girl, to teach her, to raise her, and make her more 'like what a woman ought to be'; and Mrs. Coode, believing she thoroughly gauged the feelings of her son, pledged her word that she would do what he asked her. Other women might have doubted the motive for this request, but not Mrs. Coode. ''Tis because he's resolved in his mind to put an end to it,' she argued, 'that he asks me to do this for her. He's my own child there, every inch of him. Well, we've each our part to play; he must go abroad and strive, and I must stay home and ask help for him.'

Could the mother have looked into her son's heart twenty-four hours earlier, or on this very morning of his return home, assuredly she would have had the satisfaction of being convinced that the help she had asked had been given. Roger himself was secure in the same belief. The Roger who had been afraid to stay, who had given way to his love, was prostrate and subdued, overcome by the reasonable, right-judging, respectable man who was the pattern for his shipmates, and the example pointed at by his superiors.

Indulging in that retrospect induced by nearing the shores of his native land, he dwelt on his reasons for leaving them, pluming himself, patting himself on the back for the victory he had obtained. How

wise he had been in doing as he had done! That folly he had been so near giving way to would have sunk him—dragged him down as surely as tying round his neck a stone.

It had cost him a struggle, though, and one which many a man would have given in to; but not he—he was not of those to cry 'Can't help it' in the face of temptation. Once clearly make his mind up as to what he meant to do, and never fear but he would find courage and strength to do it.

The nature in the ascendant now was proud, boastful, self-reliant, and with this mood strong upon him, Roger Coode had set out for his old home.

To save him a mile or so of the distance, he had been landed between Mount Batten and Jinny Cliff, near to a bit of sloping land up which he could make his way.

When he commenced his scramble he was the man we have described him; by the time he had reached the top and looked around, the resurrection of his other being had begun. That nature, dormant and feigning death, was stirred again, had quickened and leaped into life. His blood coursed through his veins till every nerve seemed tingling, his heart thudded against his side with the fierceness of its beating.

Powerless he stood for a moment trying to recover himself, striving to cheat himself into the belief that he was halting for want of breath, and then a flood of memories burst the gates he had so long kept

closed on them, and the victories, resolutions, decisions of the past two years rolled away like a morning mist that vanishes and is gone.

'Loyalty,' murmured the breeze which wafted its welcome back to him, 'Loyalty, Loyalty'—her name seemed to fill the air, the earth, the sky.

All in vain, in the last throes of the struggle between them, did he strive to halt and slacken his pace—in vain try to overtake the mad, eager Roger by whom his sober self was outrun. Folly, folly! Humbled, abased at being defeated, he could but fling himself on the ground and confess that the battle he had fought had been fought in vain.

Little wonder that, after this trial of emotion, Mrs. Coode's keen eyes should have noticed that her son's face looked haggard and drawn. Roger had remained on the unfrequented cliff until, the first outburst of passion spent, he was able to get himself in hand again. His first duty was to see his mother —to go to his home. These were not the days of correspondence and letter-writing, and beyond knowing that she was alive, he knew nothing more.

Descending the high-rounded hill which shuts out the sea from the village, Roger was accosted at once by neighbours and friends all ready to give him welcome. Surely that act in life's drama in which he had just taken part was a dream—a nightmare from which he had aroused to find himself strong again? His mother! How glad he was to see her—how anxious to listen to what she had to tell him! Only

all the time there was that consciousness of a balance trembling, that needed but a feather's weight to set it again in motion.

The recital of Loyalty's evil doings filled Roger with a mad anger against which he strove, until forced to give way to that burst of swearing which, while it terrified his mother, seemed to bring ease to him. The torrent of words ended, that flame which had burnt so fiercely within him went suddenly out, and his heart, icy and cold, sunk within him like lead.

Leaving the cottage, except for the inability to remain still, he could not have given any reason for going out—and certainly none for going to the place where he found himself standing.

It was the very spot where in that foolhardy love of adventure he had once climbed down. Since that time, to prevent a similar danger, a few rough stones had been piled together like a wall, and on the topmost of these Roger leaned his arms.

Yes, down that sharp spine with its slaty projections he remembered lowering himself, and then dropping below; and he gave vent to a short hard laugh, as he recalled the thrill of horror which ran through him when he saw the last slate, the one he had dropped himself by, in his hand—with his weight it had given way. A glance down to the sea showed him that all hope was gone, he could not retrace his steps up, there was nothing but sheer rock down. The green mound, which from above seemed so safe, was when gained a crumbling pinnacle.

With terrible anguish of heart the lad had given himself up for lost. No one would see him, evening was coming on; by the morning—a choking sob rose in his throat. Just then he heard his name; and, through the mist which dimmed his sight, he saw the brown face and the big eyes of that child, who, though often, like a dog, driven by him back, would creep after him and hover near him whenever she could.

There was a parley between them quick and decisive; for, with the sunburnt sticks, which had looked so substantial, giving way like touchwood beneath him, Roger knew there was no time to lose. Loyalty was directed to reconnoitre, and she gave her report graphically.

'Then 'tis no use,' he called back to her. 'Don't come no further, or we shall both be over together.'

'What will you do, then?'

'I can't hold on for much longer;' and he stopped, trying to think of some message to send to his mother.

The child drew back for an instant—the next she was sliding, scrambling down the precipice, having round her neck the short stuff petticoat which she had taken off, and which left very little underneath.

'You'll be dashed in bits and killed!' shouted Roger; but she paid no heed. 'Don't ye hear what I says?' he cried.

She brought herself sitting on the now last ledge of the rock with her back placed firmly against its surface. 'I don't care if so,' she answered indif-

ferently. 'Cos if you falls in I throws myself after you; so come;' and she lowered the petticoat down. 'Hold on firm, and I'll hoist with might and main.'

How, and by what miracle, the two ever reached the top was never known; but get there they did—he and Loyalty—this same Loyalty who had grown into a woman, and who was now hurrying to her own destruction, with her eyes as much open as when she had looked over before climbing down that cliff.

He tried to feel sorry, but he could not; to have some concern about her, but he did not care. Evidently all love was over. Well, best it should be so; was it not for that cause he had gone away? He ought to be thankful, after the battle of the afternoon, that his madness was dead and passed; as to what became of her, what mattered that to him? And chilled by a numbness which seemed stealing over body as well as over heart and brain, he gave a shiver and was about to turn and go away, when a warm breath close to his cheek set every fibre of his being in flame, and into his ear a voice breathless with emotion whispered, 'Roger.'

CHAPTER IV

THE flood of light which the moon flung on all around fell on Loyalty's upturned face, as Roger, whirled by a sudden madness out of himself, drew back his head so that his eyes might rest on her.

He had not loosened his hold, her lithe form was still pressed against his beating heart, his arms but tightened the embrace in which they had caught her.

'Would you have know'd me for the same? Am I changed any way?'

The question was asked with the exultant consciousness of a woman who knows she has grown more beautiful every day.

'Changed?' he said, speaking with an effort—'no—not any ways. You'm just what you was when I left—to me.'

Loyalty's eyes quivered, there was a momentary feeling of disappointment, the natural vanity of her feminine nature rebelled that the beauty which drove other men to distraction should be powerless with him.

'Just the same—just the same,' he went on repeating, catching his breath between the words, and holding it hard in the struggle he was making to impose on himself some self-restraint. Suddenly his strength seemed to desert him, his arms relaxed their hold, and, leaning against the rough wall, he passed his hand across his forehead to rid it of the clammy dew. It was the work of an instant, but to Roger it seemed an age, so long that it was necessary he should speak—say something to break the silence of this awkward pause.

'Well, you'm about the last one I thought to meet up here,' he began, with an attempt at a forced laugh. 'Where are you bound to? What are you

after ?' Then giving her no time to reply, he added roughly, ''Tis much too late for females to be wanderin' about, and you all by yourself, too.'

Could she have come there to meet any one? Each name his mother had coupled hers with passed before him in letters of liquid fire. 'Who did you expect to find waitin' here ?'—and he seized her by the arm roughly—' eh ?—answer me.'

But though she winced she did not shrink from him.

'You,' she said exultingly. 'I heard them tell the ship was in, but no leave was to be got, and there'd be no comin' ashore till to-day. Oh, the hours I've stood with eyes strained lookin' out to sea ! 'Twould come over me, all to once, when I was sittin' quiet and alone that the ship—your ship—was hove in sight, and I'd set off to run so fast as legs could carry me, and stand out to Point screechin' and hollerin' your name, in hopes the wind would carry out the sound, if so you was among the sail that passed by.'

'And when did you hear I'd come ?' asked Roger, in a softened tone.

'On Monday, in the mornin'; and I set off, and never stopped till I was down over Worse'll, and 'pon the beach below. I says, "If I can't have sight of the barque that holds 'un, I'll take my fill of the water that has washed its keel"—oh, but I did dash out into it !' And she stretched her arms wide with a gesture of impassioned abandonment,

which made Roger snatch her again to him and rain kisses on her willing lips.

Why, why could they not be transported far from there?—away where no one knew him, no one knew her, where there was nothing to interfere with this delirium of bliss which he had not the power to withstand? These thoughts went whirling through his brain, while on his ears fell the words Loyalty was speaking.

'There's barely a day passed,' she murmured, not freeing herself, but raising her eyes so that they might bask in the sunlight of the love that poured from his, 'but I've spared the time to find myself up here.'

'You have! For why?'

''Twas here we parted — you haven't forgot?' Without words Roger gave his answer, 'Just 'bout the spot whereon we're standin' now;' and a quick-drawn sigh paid tribute to the sadness of that leave-taking. 'Oh! but the turf ought to grow green here, for from first to last since you've been gone I've shed tears by the buckets over it.'

'Yes?' he said absently. 'What cause was there to do that for?'

She began her reply, the prelude to the penitent confession she was resolved to make to him, but he was not listening. He had buried his face in her wealth of hair, the stray locks of which the wind was gently stirring.

'What makes you go about like this?' he asked,

his tone sharpened by fresh-kindled emotion, 'without no coverin' on your head—no hat, nor headgear of any kind, such as other maidens wear?'

'Oh, let that bide,' she said impatiently, hurt at the interruption; 'don't begin about that now.' Then her quick eyes noting the shadow that had come over his face, she sought to chase it by saying—

> 'What's to us what others do,
> So's you'm for me and I'm for you!'

but the old saw instead of soothing turned its sentiment in the opposite direction. It was everything to Roger what others did. He had been trained to live by rule and pattern.

Loyalty made another effort. ''Sides which,' she said, 'I should have put somethin' on, only at first I didn't mean to come so far; and if I had,' she went on, floundering in her excuses, 'grandfer and them would have noticed what I done, so I slipped off whiles they was sittin', with just my apern flung over my head.'

Roger gave a petulant 'Tish! it's the old game, then, still goin' on down there?' And he freed Loyalty and took a step back further from her.

A rush of colour mounted to her face, with a feeling of hot anger, which the next instant gave place to the choking of coming tears.

'You'll find the old man's put a good score of years on his back, Roger, since you last saw him'—she was struggling bravely to overcome her emotion

—'you've never seed him bowed as now;' and she bent her own back to give an idea of the measure of her grandfather's infirmity; 'he hasn't got not a quarter of the strength to put out that he used to.'

The attitude she had taken drew Roger's attention from her face to her form, faultless in its budding womanhood.

'Which means you'm set to do his work; I know,' he said savagely, furious that any one had the power to impose a task on her; 'there's nothin' I hates equal to seein' a woman in a man's place; it angers me more than I've got words to say.'

'Yes, I minds you never could abide it'—her tone was conciliatory now, they had drawn nearer together; 'I often wish myself there wasn't so much of it to do, and that I might sit more to my needle and sew.'

'Sew!' and he laughed contemptuously; 'it's precious little love of sewin' you've got in you.'

In that moment, while she was speaking, Roger's riotous imagination had carried him to the wild habitation which Loyalty called home. With the eye of memory he saw her dragging nets, running up the boats, freeing the crab pots barefooted, bareheaded: and the jarring contrast of the girl as she was, and the girl he wished her to be, rankled with the bitterness of gall. 'If that was any ways true, you'd have been ready to learn of them as was willin' to teach you.'

'And who says I wasn't ready to learn?'—her

pent-up anger had burst into flame; 'that's your old mother, what she's been tellin' of you. I might have know'd that you would hardly be suffered to fetch breath in the place afore she'd be tellin' a parcel o' lies to set you against me. Religion, I s'pose, she calls it. I——'

There was a struggle to keep in the words, but out they would come.

'Hates her — spiteful old——' But here she stopped, and by a supreme mastery managed to swallow the final opprobrious epithet.

'Thank ye,' said Roger dryly; 'don't fret that there's much love lost between you.'

'I don't expect there is; but answer truly, Roger — do I begin about she? Never! — tho' I might; yes, and talk on till day dawn, and then I shouldn't have told the half of all she's made me to suffer.'

Roger curled his lip incredulously.

''Tis mostly the way of them that's in the wrong; they've naught but complaints to utter 'gainst anybody who strives to set 'em straight again. My mother'—and he assumed a tone of incontestable authority—'is a respectable, proper-conducted woman. The young ones as is fashioned on the lines of *my mother* won't need to fear about much fault being found with 'em.'

'I don't deny anythin' you thinks of her'—Roger's cold, measured tone chilled the heat of Loyalty's anger—'and I have tried to carry out what she's

told me. 'Tain't the not wantin' to be learned things, Roger'—Loyalty's voice began to grow tremulous in its humility—'but 'tis her way—scoffin', scornin', as if I was beneath the very dirt that's under her feet. Miss Anne never treats me that way, and she a lady born and that——'

'I don't know about Miss Anne or Miss Anybody,' said Roger sternly, 'but this I do know: that if you can anger my mother, or in any ways run counter to her, that you'll do.'

His gaze was no longer fixed on Loyalty; he resolutely avoided looking at her. 'It isn't that it's a matter of any great moment to me, 'tis only because 'tis for your good that makes what you choose to do of any consequence in my eyes.'

A smothered sob, the cry as of a wounded animal, unconsciously escaped her. She would have flung her arms around him but that he pushed her aside.

'No,' he exclaimed harshly, 'there's been too much of that already. I've been to blame there. Cos others can make free is no reason why I should do the same.'

Poor Loyalty! love is so blind that she did not detect the mad jealousy that prompted this accusation. Roger's lips were white with passion; the words were rather hissed out than spoken.

'Ah!' she cried, clutching at him so that he was forced to look her in the face, 'so it's them lies she's been poisonin' your ears with. Tell me—tell me!' and strong man as he was she shook him with the

fury that was quivering her whole frame—'I'll know every single word she's had to say!'

By an effort Roger freed himself from her hold.

'If you didn't know there was somethin' to tell, you couldn't tell there was anythin' to fear.'

'And you could believe it of me?'

The thought seemed to stab her like a sword.

'Roger'—placing herself so that he could not again turn from her—'Roger, as there's a God above who sees us both, I've been true as gilded gold to you. If not, could I stand as now, face to face, lookin' at you? Lord!' she cried, flinging up her arms and bursting into a passion of tears, 'and all I've done, and suffered to do it, too, and the end is you give credit to the false slanders of that lyin' tongue. Has she ever been called on to battle day by day with such gaol-bird vagabonds as my lot is cast among? Sit down to sewin'! and listen to preachin' and hymn-singin' in chapels!' she laughed discordantly; 'there's been other work for me to do. I've had to sing songs, to dance, to wheedle and coax, so that some show o' peace and quiet should be kep' among 'em there; and when that didn't serve, I've bullied and swored, and fought, and sent 'em off with the ten commandments printed on their faces—anythin', so that when the time comed I could take God as my witness that I'd been faithful and true to you, Roger.'

Elevated by the tragic protest she had made, Loyalty stood unconsciously sublime in the dignity

of her outraged love. The great wave of passionate affection had been forced back upon her, leaving her future a barren wreck-strewn shore. Roger, certain that she spoke the truth as though he had witnessed her every action, was suddenly become emotionless, hard, cold as stone. The graphic picture of her daily struggles had seemed to him like the pouring in of molten lead, but torture had killed the impassioned lover, and had left the self-contained, sober Roger in its stead.

In silence they remained facing each other, eyes fixed on eyes, features set—occupied with the passions working within them.

Loyalty was the first to arouse herself. Poor soul! at a glance she took in the change wrought in Roger; sad experience had given her a familiarity with that adamantine face. A shiver ran through her, a little click came in her throat, as the words she wanted to say refused to take sound from her. All she possessed of earth and heaven seemed gone. In her despair she put out her arms, as if to push him further away, and then turned and fled.

CHAPTER V

FOR some moments after Loyalty had gone Roger stood immovable; then, with a shake, as if to bring himself to life, he leaned his elbows on the stone-heaped wall, and let his eyes rest on the great surface of unrippled water.

The moon, thinly veiled now and again by flying scud, had turned the sea into a silver mirror. Plash, plash came the waves, as though they sought to softly woo the shore.

Usually the scene would have delighted Roger—keenly alive to all the beauties of his native place—but the torpor of indifference seemed to stultify his senses; he either looked without seeing, or saw without feeling.

Suddenly he started. On his ear had fallen a shrill, far distant cry, doubtless some sea-bird roused—or, could it be? The second surmise was barely shaped in thought before Roger was flying along in hot pursuit, never slackening his speed until he came in sight of Loyalty. She, rushing blindly on, pushed her way through bramble and gorse; he, by striking into a lower path, escaped her notice, while still keeping her in view as they wound down, round the cliff together.

At a point where the cleft rock makes an approach to the water easy, Loyalty halted, bent over, and then disappeared from sight. This was Roger's opportunity to take his stand from where he could watch her crossing, for the moon, well overhead, now lit up the opposite shore, leaving that they were on in shadow.

The receding tide had left the boat high and dry, well up the mud-covered beach. Stretched out in its bottom, Dunchy lay sleeping, doubly deaf to the calls which, before swinging herself down, Loyalty had given him.

The position of the boat was happily chosen; for while she lay safe and secure between two jutting stones, it needed but a vigorous shove to send her, as from a slip, safe into the water. Loyalty's trained eyes noted this; and giving up her attempts to arouse the old man, she picked up the sculls, threw them in, and stooping so as to bring all her strength to bear, Roger heard the run of the keel, saw Loyalty jump in, and the next moment dexterously push the boat out from shore.

Admiration for her nimbleness and skill overcame for a moment the dissatisfaction always felt by Roger at any display of Loyalty's cleverness in boat management. Of late years this had been a particularly sore point with him. His mother, and other women whose good opinion he would have liked her to possess, censured this talent unsparingly. It was all well enough, they said, to 'put yourself across,' meaning to row from side to side of the winding water which separated the two villages from each other; 'against that nobody could have a word to offer; but to be out in all weathers, blow high, blow low, pullin' at the oars, trimmin' sails, standin' to the tiller without a bit o' nothin' on her head, and often half-way up her knees in water, was the place of men and boys, and in a young female 'twas most improper, and what nobody counted respectable was ever known to do.'

Respectable! Yes; respectability was the rock on which Roger's love was shipwrecked, the god he

had been trained to fear and to obey. His mother had lived respectably, had so kept him, and brought him up, that they were thought well of and looked up to by all who knew them.

There was not a single girl in either village nor for miles around but would have been willing to say yes to an offer from him to marry her; yet in perverseness, to torment and distract him, his heart refused to open to any but to this one, who was the scorn of all on whose good opinion he set value.

These unpalatable reflections were beginning to embitter him, when his attention was riveted by a conversation just commencing.

Half-way across Dunchy awakened, and raising himself up by aid of the gunwale, he rested on the other arm as he said—

'What's up, eh? I b'ain't in my bed, be I?'

'Yes, in yer own four-poster; can't 'ee see?'

'Awh,' chuckled the old man, ''tis you, ye hussy, is it? You've went and shoved the boat off, and me a-lyin' to the bottom of un. I wish I'd ha' catched 'ee; you should ha' got toky for yam. Why wheres have 'ee bin to all this whiles up along there? Sweetheartin', is it—eh?'

Although in the stillness you could hear every sound, Roger strained his ear to catch her answer.

'Sweetheartin'!' she said. 'Lors no, there's been no sweetheartin' for me to-night.'

'Some o' they youngsters is down there now,' said

Dunchy half-questioningly. 'I see'd tall Nick the wrastler go past that way. Not that I wants 'ee to take up with such as he.'

'Don't 'ee?' she said abstractedly.

'Why, no, he's a porcher. Awh, you've only got to ax me, I'll tell 'ee how the land lies with most on 'em. Didn't I spot they two as shot the Cap'n's land over last regatta twelvemonth? I can't help laughin' now,' he added after a minute's pause, 'to think how grandfer plied Sandy Scott, th' ole gamekeeper, with liquor, and a good skinful he can hold, too. 'Twas needin' all his powers to get his legs to carry un home, but the crafty ole raskil had got the cunnin' to know bed was his surest haven. And there his wife, shiverin' and shakin', sat by the bedside listenin' to the shots flyin' like wildfire, and he a-snorin' like a 'og.'

'Why, you seem to know all about it,' said Loyalty, perceiving by the pause that some remark was expected of her.

'In course I does. Why, 'twarn't long after day dawn that I sees the chaps come down, and they pitches two sacks off their shoulders, and they calls out to me, "Give us a shove down, will 'ee?" But I wasn't willin' to be over spry, so I pertended not to hear. "Come," they says, "look alive, maister," they says, "and us 'll give 'ee a shillin'." So that made me more nimble, and I took 'em to where I know'd was the best place. "There," I says, "now up through that thicket, 'cross the fields,

and over the hill, and if you don't find yourselves in the Plymouth Road, don't go for to blame me."'

'You got your shillin' all right,' Loyalty said, in seeming sympathy.

'Awh, he was safe enuf—and later on there was set up a reg'lar hoo-and-cry who'd seed 'em, and how they'd got off. So I was axed, and I telled 'em same as I have you, how they come down, and what they says, and that they gived me a shillin' for landin' they and their two sacks; and then all was for makin' out that I ought to have inquired what was in the sacks. "Not I," I says; "they axed me to give 'em a shove down, and that I give 'em, and they gived me a shillin', and that's enuf for me to know; I minds me own business; I axes no questions, and gets told no lies." That's all the information they could manage to get out o' me.'

The boat had reached the other side, and Loyalty, whose ears had listened while her thoughts had strayed far away, said by way of parting, 'And you wouldn't say no to another job of the same kind, would you?'

'No, fay I wouldn't,' laughed the old man, 'nor grandfer neither, if so be 'twas over Cap'n's land. He do hate he like pison; and 'taint altogether to be wondered at neither, for, turn it as you will, the Cap'n was the cause, if without blame, of yer father's bein' hanged.'

'I only wish that they'd strung me up alongside un,' said Loyalty despondingly.

'Why, how for ever could that ha' been done, seein' you wasn't so much as born then?'

'More's the pity that I should ha' been born at all—brought into the world with everybody's hand against me.'

'Come, I say—cheer up, lovely! 'Tain't often you'm took this way.'

Loyalty's tears, long gathered in her eyes, now fell in a torrent from them.

'Oh, Dunchy,' she sobbed, 'I don't know what I shall do. I don't no longer seem to care what becomes of me.'

'But there's scores o' them that do—why, me for one—you gone, who'd, I wonder, worrit over me? I might die like a rat in a hole, for aught any other mortal soul than you 'ud ax where I was gone to. Why, whatever is it now?' and Dunchy peered anxiously at her. 'Who've 'ee been up there with? Roger, eh?—is it he? Has he been jawin' of 'ee, tellin' about Phœbe Rowe? Somethin' o' that sort, I'll bet a guinea.'

Loyalty sighed dismally. 'It don't matter, Phœbe Rowe or Phœbe Anybody; 'tis certain I ain't got his fancy.'

'Then I'm blamed if 'tis flesh and blood he's made of. I told 'ee I thought he might marry Phœbe Rowe, and so I still thinks he may; but give his heart to her when he might have the chance of you—never!' And Dunchy emphasized his conviction by snapping his fingers contemptuously.

Loyalty let drop the apron all soaked by her tears.

'You blessed old dear,' she cried, trying to smile, 'you always find some word o' comfort to say to me. There,' and she tried to wipe her face dry, 'I feels better now, so I'd best be off as quick as I can; I reckon any ways I'm bound to catch it from grandfer.'

She turned to begin the almost perpendicular ascent up the hill, making her way through the wooded thicket which runs down to the river and stretches each way far along its banks.

Amid the leafy short trees Dunchy soon lost sight of her, but confident that she was within hearing, he called out what he felt would give her further consolation.

'Here, I say!' he shouted, with a hand scooped on either side of his mouth to insure his communication being confidential: 'I'll keep my weather eye open to-morrow, and if I picks up anything 'bout Roger *You-knows-who*, I'll let 'ee know.'

'All right,' was answered back, 'do; and if you keeps a weather eye open now 'twill be so well, for if wrastlin' Nick's got down with t'other three, they'll none of 'em be over sober when they reaches here.'

And it was these words which broke the silence that had followed since they reached the shore—Roger's ears caught them distinctly.

The companion and friend of a dissolute old ferryman (Dunchy's reputation had not the best odour)—

counting among her admirers such vagabonds as poachers and wrestlers—going back to the drunken crew which surrounded her brutal old grandfather!

Roger had once more become a reasonable being. Retracing his steps home, he reflected on his recent behaviour. He was not a man to screen his own faults any more than he did those of his fellows. He had acted, he told himself, like a coward and a villain; the girl was there to take or to leave alone; he had no excuse for taking the advantage he had of her.

Humiliated, defeated, not able to entirely rid himself of the excitement which had so vanquished his self-control, Roger was not able to thoroughly disentangle all recollection of pleasure from his pain. Every now and again he unconsciously stopped, stood lost in thought, and then as unconsciously hurried on again. The hour was not late, the clock had but just struck ten, yet along the whole length of the Lees not a soul had Roger met. Ferrers folk kept early hours; if they went to bed late they could not get up betimes. The limekiln past, he reached the first house—the beginning of that row of which his mother's house was one.

Built to satisfy varying requirements and to gratify different tastes, not two of these dwellings were uniform either in size or in architecture, but they were all pervaded by the same air of cleanliness and comfort, the few shrubs grown high and railed in so as to furnish a screen to the ground-floor windows.

The narrow roadway separated the plots of garden ground, in which among useful herbs and vegetables grew currants, gooseberries, and a few time-honoured flowers. From most of these gardens a flight of rough steps led down to the water, here encircled by land, with a separate village and parish on either side. High rising cliffs hedge both these villages in, so that houses and water seem in a ravine, while beyond the steep ascents the sea spreads out and dashes against the coasts.

In the house in which Mrs. Coode lived Roger had been born; his mother had come to it a bride. The substantial furniture bore testimony to her early savings, for she had not married young, nor until, she boasted, she could have everything respectable around her.

Carefully opening and closing the house-door, he went into the little parlour, where to his surprise the banked-up fire was still burning. On the table a candlestick with tinder-box and matches were placed. Lighting the candle, Roger held it up so that he might look around him. Comfortable, neat, orderly, everything filled him with a proper pride at feeling this was his home. There was not, he believed, the equal of that room in the whole of Ferrers; every single thing in its proper place—for Roger had the true sailor love of order—and all so bright and polished up and cared for, he'd challenge any one to find a speck of dirt there. 'Twas a house where, as the saying was, you might eat your meat off the

floor. And then, with the light still held on high, he mentally recalled another home he knew, and at the recollection he gave an involuntary shudder, drew a deep-drawn breath between his firmly-set teeth, and planting down his heel as if to crush his love, 'Twould break her heart,' he murmured; 'it can't be—it can't be.'

Taking off his shoes, he crept as quietly as a mouse up to bed, while Mrs. Coode, who had been watching, listening for his return, kept anxiously repeating, 'Whatever can he have been doin' of? Wherever has he been to?'

CHAPTER VI

THE dwelling which Roger had pictured, and which during his troubled dreams that night he constantly saw, was placed so as to seem part of a rift of rock, divided and stretched out into the two long reefs which make the danger of Fairstoke Bay.

Pointed to as the only remaining trace of the swept-away village, which, not so very long before, was gathered round the venerable church, still standing, no human being had ever harboured the idea of making it a habitation.

Stories had long been rife of the amount of smuggling carried on in this little-frequented spot, and it was often said with significant meaning, that

many a night the old church was filled with spirits who'd never worn flesh or inhabited bodies.

In broad day the revenue cutters might often be seen cruising about there, but at night they very wisely eschewed exposing themselves to the dangers of landing, when the chances of capture were less than the probabilities of failure.

Some thirty years or more before the opening of this story, Jake George first began to be noticed by persons still living in Ferrers and Fairstoke. He protested then against being counted as a stranger, asserting that he had often been to and fro from Jersey and Dieppe there, when more peaceful times permitted the crabbing trade to be carried on by a vessel which ran between Ferrers and these places.

All these so-called fishing smacks lay under the suspicion that they belonged to, or had to do with, smuggling; and the fact that Mr. Pellew, the recently appointed Collector of Customs, was making this illicit trade a much more difficult occupation, might have accounted for the presence of certain men in villages, about whom nobody could say for certain whence they came, or what they found to do there.

Whether Jake George had ever been one of these desperate crews, who, running their cargoes in armed vessels, had placed their lives in jeopardy, was known to no one who ever repeated the tale.

A great blow had been dealt by the death of the notorious Willard, and the capture of the *Happy go Lucky*. The prisoners taken in her, and lodged in

Pendennis Castle, had been rescued and carried off by a strong body of their friends; but so strict and vigilant was the search made after them, that those who escaped then, continued to remain in hiding.

In after years, when local events had branded him, his enemies were certain that George was among this rescued band; but at the time he came—paying his way and owing no man, lodging at an obscure little farm-house inland—nobody troubled himself about him. He said he'd been sick, and that accounted for his not working—that a billhook had gashed his leg, and left it wounded. 'Cuts o' that sort was troublesome to heal, and by that reason he was lame.'

About a year after his first appearance, a little girl was seen with him. His wife, he told the farm people, was dead, had left him a widow man with that one child to look after; a friend had sent her from Jersey, and he'd been to Plymouth to fetch her home.

What truth was in these statements, now concerns no one. The father and daughter settled down, and no more curiosity was felt about them.

Ferrers House at that time was possessed and occupied by Sir Jasper Hamlyn, 'the Admiral,' as he preferred to be, and in Ferrers and Fairstoke always was, called. The disappointment and sorrow he had felt in losing a daughter and several sons, were in prospect of now being forgotten in the pride and interest he took in the naval career of his

nephew, Carleton Hamlyn, whom he destined to be the husband of his only remaining child Anne.

Had the father but permitted love and fancy to take their own way, his scheme would have prospered happily. Carleton Hamlyn, heir to the Admiral's landed property—no great estate, but which had belonged to the family for some generations—was penniless, except for his pay; it was therefore to his interest to marry his cousin, who had, for those days, and that out-of-the-world part of the country, a fairly respectable fortune. Added to this, Anne was a charmingly pretty creature, fairy-like and feminine; the ideal woman, one would have said, to ensnare the love of this bold, handsome young sailor, already fortunate in having attracted the notice of Captains Nelson and Collingwood, with both of whom he had sailed.

Not having seen Carleton since he was a mischievous boy, going but little into society, very seldom thrown into the company of young men, Anne felt her heart taken by storm. It needed all her strength and pride to keep her cousin from seeing that she had already given him the love, which as yet he had not asked of her.

But no such reticence guided the Admiral. Barely did he permit his nephew breathing time on shore, before he began on the subject uppermost in his mind; and, still insisting that with his household, and all those over whom he had control, 'quarter-deck authority' should be maintained, he was most

exasperated that Carleton did not at once yield implicit obedience to everything he proposed.

'You must give me time, sir,' expostulated the nephew.

'Give you the devil, sir!' said the irascible old man. 'Do you mean to insult me, and to—to—to insult my daughter?'

'Uncle! uncle!'

'Uncle be d——d, sir! I'm her father, sir, and I've proposed to you a wife, that there's not a man who walks a quarter-deck in the British fleet but would be down on his knee to thank me for; and you, my own nephew, must haw and hum, and want to be given time to. Take my word for this, sir, that if you didn't bear the name I bear, and weren't to step into the shoes I leave behind me, by the Lord Harry you should never have the chance offered you again!'

Carleton saw that the old martinet's temper had got the better of him. Happily it was never long before his bursts of passion gave way to a more genial humour. As boy and man, Carleton had tested the really good heart of the fine old fellow; and being of a very sweet disposition himself, he never took serious offence at anything his uncle said to him.

Later on, between the little bits repeated by Carleton and the recurring irritation of her father, Anne formed a very just notion of the cause of dispute between them. Skilfully approaching the con-

versation, she delicately led up to the subject with her cousin, and was considerably relieved by Carleton's manner to her.

'You know, Anne,' he said, 'I believe you and I love each other dearly?'

'Yes, I believe we do.'

Anne felt that on her part she could say that most truthfully.

'And I shouldn't be a bit surprised, if all of a hurry, say some day when I was ordered off to sea, we made up our minds and got spliced, you and I.'

'Shouldn't you?' Anne's blue eyes feigned the greatest astonishment.

'Why, no, nor you either;' and he stole his arm round her waist, drawing her nearer, as he said, with more than cousinly effusion, 'You do care for me that way a little bit, don't you?'

Anne's head nodded in reply.

'And I care more than a little bit for you,' he continued stoutly; 'only we aren't going to be bullied into marrying, are we?'

'Certainly not.'

'All the same we understand each other, and know what we both mean, eh?'

A sweet expression came into Anne's face as she looked up at him, prompting Carleton to say—

'You'll give me a kiss, Anne, won't you?' And, putting his hand under her chin, he bent down and kissed her.

It was nearly twenty years now since that first

lover-like kiss had passed between them—no other man ever had pressed his lips on hers—and yet Anne was Miss Anne still, and Carleton Hamlyn was still a bachelor.

When these events were occurring, Jake George's daughter was grown into a woman. Susan George and Anne Hamlyn were nearly the same age. At some rural festivity Carleton remarked the girl, and asking who she was, heard her spoken of as a stranger not belonging to the village or related to any there. The father and daughter worked at whatever they could get to do; and George being clever and handy as a carpenter, Anne had employed him, and from time to time had also given Susan needlework.

In her kindly heart, full of sympathy for her fellow-creatures, especially those whom she deemed less happy than herself, Anne felt great pity for this young stranger, who, living out of the village, had no companions but her singularly silent, taciturn father.

That the stern, middle-aged man idolized his girl was to discerning eyes evident; he, too, in his humble walk of life, had his parental ambition; he aspired to see Susan the wife of a small farmer, the son of the woman he had lodged with when he first came to Fairstoke. At no distance from the little cottage they lived in, George might often be found leaning on the gate, looking at the old gray-walled farmhouse, longing, hoping, almost praying that he might live to see Susan mistress there. Ignorant of all religion, he had yet an intuition that there must be a

law of compensation. Surely for the struggle he was making, some reward would be given him; and that reward, he asked, should be the prosperity and welfare of his child.

Without being a village beauty, Susan George had much that was most attractive in her, and one or two other swains besides the prospectively coveted son-in-law, the farmer, had shown interest in her.

Speaking about the Georges one day in the presence of her cousin, Anne asked Carleton if he had yet sent to be repaired a box that had got damaged in packing, suggesting that if he had not, George would put it in order quite as neatly and as well as the cabinet-maker at Plymouth.

In days to come, Anne often recalled how she and Carleton had taken the box and walked to the cottage together. George, she remembered, was not at home, but they went in and rested, talking the while to Susan.

When the box came home, her cousin showed that he was satisfied with her recommendation and the way the work was done, by taking his dressing-case which wanted mending, and several other small jobs, to George to attend to.

Beyond this, Anne could recollect nothing more. Susan was present at an annual Christmas party given at Fairstoke House, but Anne could not remember that any especial notice was taken of her.

Almost immediately on this, to the surprise of everybody, came the declaration of war. Men and

officers were called up at once for active service, and Carleton Hamlyn received orders to join the *Loyalty* at Spithead without delay.

With the warrior spirit of an old commander, excited by the prospect of fighting being near, the Admiral urged and aided his nephew's departure, forgetting all his matrimonial aims in the welfare of his country, and his desire that a Hamlyn should assist to uphold its honour.

Anne strove to take part in the patriotism of her father, and to share in the excitement of her—lover, was she to call him? In the opinion of all their friends, confirmed and strengthened by the Admiral's outspoken allusions, Anne and Carleton were universally looked upon as an engaged couple. But of late the girl had had many misgivings. Into her rosy dream had crept a shadow—the shadow of what, she could not have told—but she knew there was a difference, a doubt, a vague suspicion, which, without having any tangible ground for, she could not help feeling. Contrary to her wishes also, her appreciation of his character had become clearer. The hero, reckless, daring, in courage and in action bold as a lion, was morally weak as water. He could be led and swayed by each passing emotion. He might commit a crime in a moment of passion, and expiate it by a life of remorse and despair. Yet Anne, seeing this as in a glass before her, like many another woman, having given him her heart, loved him, if possible, more tenderly than before.

At the moment of parting, overcome by the dread of the many sad fortunes of war, Anne's powers of self-control gave way, and she openly discovered to her cousin how dear he was to her. Carleton on his side saw too plainly now that all that was best of his affections was centred on Anne, and on Anne only. In spite of which, mingled with the sweetness of reciprocated love, each felt that never had the dark cloud been so visible to both as at that moment when they were forced to say 'Good-bye.'

CHAPTER VII

WHAT that suspicion was, Anne Hamlyn never breathed to mortal creature. She even refused to acknowledge it to herself. But the germ then dropped remained, to expand itself almost into certainty on a later day.

The Admiral, who had long known himself to be suffering from a disease which precluded all hope of cure, was seized with a more than ordinarily severe attack. He insisted on going to Plymouth to consult his doctor, and, arrived there, was too ill to get back again home.

The anxiety of nursing him, coupled with the grief of learning that she must prepare herself for the inevitable final separation, forbade Anne giving her usual keen interest to the people she dwelt among. Her one thought was, would it be possible to get

her father home? The old man's great longing, to be again under the roof of the house in which he was born, remained for months ungratified. At length a flicker of renewed strength made the removal possible, and Anne and her father returned home.

Little had happened to relate in their absence. Susan George was married—that was something to tell; and to young Kellow at the farm. 'It was not much of a match for any other girl—a tumble-down house, with not more than two or three fields round, no stock worth speaking of, and a pinch to pay the rent, now old Mrs. Kellow was gone. But to see George, you'd think for son-in-law he'd got the king; never was a man more altered than he. He was up early and to bed late, digging, and ploughing, and labouring to whatever came to hand; speaking and nodding, too, to folks as they went by; none of his old moody ways now. It was Susan who seemed to have taken up with them. She was so silent and lumpy, you'd hardly have known her for the same. There were those who would have it that all the love was on Kellow's side; but, be that as it may, it was Susan who was most eager for the wedding to come off. Many looked on it as being indecent not to wait till the old woman was got cold in her grave.'

Anne could not have said why, but the fact of this wedding was an enormous relief to her; so much so, that when her father now talked of the time when she and Carleton should be one, she no longer tried to change the subject, or speak of it half-heartedly.

She even gave encouragement to the old man, and gladdened his heart by her ready promises that they would carry out all his wishes and plans together.

The grim tyrant was drawing very near to the brave old sailor's side. Through the door of that house, never shut on suffering or want, death had stolen silently in. There were some few weeks of struggle before, to quote himself, the Admiral could be brought to haul down his flag; and then, with the fancy that his ship was nearing land, giving a feeble cheer that he was safe in port, Jasper Hamlyn died.

Weeks elapsed before Anne could realize her loss. In the midst of war, her cousin wrote, he found it impossible, even for a day, to return home. Other relatives came, and at Carleton's entreaty Anne consented to go away, and for a time stay with them.

Some months went by before she returned to Ferrers, to learn that she was not the only one to whom sorrow had come. Dick Kellow, Susan George's husband, returning from Yealmpton, had been set on by a press gang and carried away, nobody could find out where; 'and there was poor Susan looking for, soon, a baby to be born, and she up to the horrid old farmhouse all alone, with no one but her father near her, and he, by reason of having the whole of the work to do, always away.'

Full of sympathy, Anne decided to write at once to Carleton, telling him this sad tale, and begging that he would set some inquiries afloat, so that they

might discover the whereabouts of the hapless man.

But, before her kindly project could be carried out, the news of a terrible catastrophe had reached them. Kellow, hitherto the most stolid of quiet men, after being dragged off to a cutter in the Sound, had been transferred with the rest of the party to the *Loyalty*, then at the Nore.

From the time of his setting foot in the ship, Kellow had displayed more than ordinary insubordination, culminating at length in his striking his superior officer, Lieutenant Hamlyn. It being felt that in the face of much want of discipline firm measures were necessary, Kellow had been immediately tried and sentenced to be hanged on board his ship; and his body to be afterwards set up on a gibbet on shore, to dangle in chains as a warning to those inclined to follow his example.

The news of this tragedy stunned the quiet villagers, to whom both these men were known; but quick on its heels another disaster came. Susan, struck down by the fatal tidings, was immediately taken ill. For forty-eight hours life and death battled for her; but, as the dawn was breaking on the third day, overtaxed nature gave in and she died, leaving her stricken father half-maddened, and a baby-girl vigorous and strong as if the whole world was waiting to give her welcome.

From Kellow's death, and this baby's birth, Anne Hamlyn dated all the unhappiness and disappoint-

ments which befell her. Carleton, in anguish, he said, at having caused a fellow-creature to lose his life, all but 'ran mad with grief'; and when he learnt that the news had killed Susan, those about him positively feared that his reason would be shaken.

Hoping that excitement or change might do some good, and not wishing that his real state should get known abroad, lest the men should exult in the mental torture of the officer, Lieutenant Hamlyn was kept for months actively employed on board the *Loyalty*, which then formed one of the fleet cruising in the Channel.

His daring, his courage, the reckless way in which he seemed to court danger, were seen during the frequent engagements which took place while in active pursuit of the enemy; and in the reports of his captain his name had such frequent honourable mention, that he received his promotion, and was made commander of a sloop of war, the *Selim*, ordered to cruise off Cape Finisterre.

From the day of this terrible occurrence, Captain Hamlyn never ceased imploring Anne to mitigate, as far as she possibly could, the sorrows of George and the unfortunate baby.

He begged that some woman might be found who would act as mother to the child, and whatever the cost, he was only too desirous to bear the burden of it.

Anne was to arrange all his business matters for him, to manage the estate, to sell, to pay, to do whatever in her eyes seemed best until his return. As

for the house, that, of course, she would not think of leaving, but let things go on exactly as they always had done; if any alteration should be needed, all could be attended to when he came home.

The tenor of his letters up to the present time were echoed words of those that had come then; Captain Hamlyn always wrote as if he might be expected any day; but though nearly twenty years had gone by, and Anne and he had met several times elsewhere, he had never set foot in Ferrers since the morning he left to join the *Loyalty*.

'Twas well for him he hadn't,' George was formerly known to say; for, to the great scandal of the villagers, the man persisted in calling Carleton Hamlyn a murderer.

In the first instance some toleration was shown to what was looked on as the frenzy of a father. But as time went on, the villagers saw that instead of bearing himself respectably, and listening to the well-meant platitudes of church and chapel, George continued to give vent to oaths and swearing, calling down curses on the head of one, who, if it had been through him that Kellow lost his life, was most assuredly the innocent cause of it. For, was it not proved upon the trial that, on account of his knowing something of the young fellow, Mr. Hamlyn had tried to hush the matter up, begging for the culprit's life as if it had been his own; and wanting to make out to everybody present there, that being seized and dragged off to sea away from wife and home had

turned the poor wretch's brain? Afterwards, too, when poor Susan was dead and gone, could mortal man, they asked, do more than he had done—offering, through Miss Anne, to provide for the child, to bear the expenses of the funeral, and to put a headstone up to Susan's name? That, they said, showed them the sort of father George must be, to refuse the offer of a decent grave for the poor soul, and to rant and rave like any untied tiger if you so much as named the Hamlyns' kindness to him. Had he been drunk, there would have been some excuse for him; for drink was tolerated as a natural resource for a man to drown his sorrows in. But George remained as sober as a judge; and the vengeance he swore, the hatred he expressed, the refusal to listen to religious consolation from anybody, tried the patience and hardened the hearts of his neighbours, until they finally came to the conclusion that such impiety and rebellion must be the result of his having previously done something awful, and therefore what had happened was a judgment fallen on him from the Almighty's hand.

The baby, had it not been for Anne's covert care, would have perished from neglect and want. Its grandfather seemed to hate its very sight, and the first years of its infant life passed in being handed from one to the other, nobody caring for it, or paying heed to it.

How George contrived to live, no one could tell;

and, there seeming to be a mystery about him, people began to regard him with suspicion. He was for ever roaming the sea-shore; he had patched up an old worn-out boat, and in it he would go out when few else cared to venture. Many a time those who watched him afar, now hidden in the angry sea, now riding over the crested billows, asserted that he would venture once too often; but, let the tempest rage as it might, George always contrived to weather the storm and to come safe to land. Finding the half-tumbled-down farm-house—out of which no one had ever turned him—inconveniently far from the dangerous element on which he took his pastime, George by degrees removed the few scanty pieces of furniture to the shelter of the ruin, which has been described as situated in Fairstoke Bay. The toil of turning this hovel into a habitable dwelling seemed to afford relief to the miserable man. Gradually he appeared less wild-looking, evinced a sort of pride in the shelter he had contrived, and his granddaughter, whom, to the scandal of everybody, he had called, after the ship her father suffered in, Loyalty, being by this time five years old, he brought the child to live with him.

Many changes had been wrought around during the years which had since then passed. Jake George could not be known as the same man he was when the heavy troubles just related fell upon him. By degrees his circumstances seemed to become better, and yet the absence of any visible proof of gaining

his livelihood remained the same. What people did see did not tend to raise him in their opinion. He bred game-cocks, which he sold, although no one could say to whom; and most of the men held in bad odour in the villages made The Cot, as he had dubbed his dwelling, their rendezvous.

With this history of her parents, her grandfather, and her surroundings, was it to be wondered at, that the carefully-brought-up, respectable Roger Coode should try to crush his love, and tear the image of Loyalty out of his heart and memory? It was for this reason he had banished himself from her, and from his home. Now that he had returned, the question was, Would pride or love gain the victory?

CHAPTER VIII

THE morning after his return home, Roger did not make his appearance until, for him, a very late hour. The night had been long and sleepless. It must have been near the dawn before he closed his eyes.

Mrs. Coode had passed a night as wakeful as her son, but she was of an age when morning restlessness is a sure sequence to mental disturbance; therefore it was in reality a positive relief to get up, and try to lose herself in the distraction of her house duties.

The breakfast was ready when Roger came down, full of excuses for the laziness which had made him so late.

Mrs. Coode never breathed a word that on the previous night she had heard him return home; she neither asked questions about his walk nor its object; and Roger, satisfied that she simply imagined he had strolled, smoking his pipe, along the Lees and back, did not affect the talkativeness he would have deemed necessary had he seen that her curiosity was excited.

'I expect for a bit everything 'll seem a little strange, Roger,' Mrs. Coode began, the breakfast being over, and her son evidently undecided as to how he should dispose of his time. 'Two years and more to sea must make it hard to realize you're on the land again.'

'Yes, I was just beginnin' to wonder what I should set myself to do.'

'The life don't appear to have disagreed with you,' continued Mrs. Coode; 'though I trust in mercy you haven't no thought of goin' no long voyages again.'

Roger laughed.

'Come, come,' he said, 'you must give me time to shake down. I haven't hardly been properly brought to my moorin's yet. One thing I know, and that is, I don't want to go so far nor so long away from mother again.'

She gave back the look of affection with which Roger was regarding her.

'Ah, it does me good to hear you say that. I dare say there's lots more besides me who, if the king's ships waited to be manned till the mothers

sent their sons aboard 'em, 'ud have a poor crew to fight the Frenchmen with.'

Roger had got up and gone to the window, where he stood looking across to the opposite side.

It was low water—an ebb tide—the bed of the river was almost dry. Amid the mud and washed-up weed a flock of ducks were feasting, quack-quacking their delight as they went along under shore. In front of the house some men and boys were digging for bait. In the angle, on the other side, close by the water's edge, stood the little public-house of Fairstoke, with its painted sign of a swan; facing it on this side, but higher up the shore, was the Ferrers inn, the Crown, the independent mind of both villages being shown in each having its own church, carrier, shop, and public-house. In this latter case, Fairstoke had the advantage; for while Ferrers was content with one house of call, Fairstoke, in addition to the quiet Swan, had the uproarious Cat and Fiddle, kept by the disreputable Hockaday.

It was towards this evil-spoken-of hostelry that Roger's thoughts were straying. He was recalling the gossip his mother had repeated—that Loyalty was known to be 'carrying on' with Hockaday's son, and had been heard to sing songs among the men assembled at the Cat and Fiddle.

'I b'lieve I'll go and take a bit of a turn over to Fairstoke, mother. Charley Edmonds' folks lives there, and I promised I'd look 'em up when I got back home.'

'Ah, he was the poor soul who got killed through fallin' from the mizzen-top,' said Mrs. Coode sympathetically.

'Yes; but before he died, though, he'd both his legs took off, and his shoulder set, and his collar-bone, too.'

'Dear heart!'

'The doctors knowed it was no good; they said from the first he was a dead man; but Charley was very much respected among 'em, and I think they wanted him to feel they was like doin' somethin' for him.'

'Um!' said Mrs. Coode; 'I likes to hear of them that's like that to poor dears away from their homes.'

'I was in the sick bay myself at the time,' added Roger, 'so seed the whole of it from first to last; and that's what makes me fancy they'll like to have a jaw with me.'

'I'm sure they will; 'twould be all the comfort in life, if 'twas my case, to know that everythin' that could be had bin done. Yes, you go to once, my dear; 'tis a act of charity.'

'What are you goin' to be up to?'

'Oh, now, don't you never mind about me; I've got the dinner to see after; and so long as you're home by ha'-past twelve to eat it, I don't ask to see your face till then.'

Roger put on his hat and went to the door, his mother following him so far.

'The voss is clear,' she said, 'if you mean to cross there.'

And after he had gone she went to the wall which separated the narrow road from the garden, and stood watching him until he had passed over the voss, as the stepping-stones are called which at low tide unite the two villages together.

Satisfied thus far, she had begun some domestic occupation, when an apparently recognised tap at the door made her call out, 'Come in.' 'Ah!' she said, with satisfaction, 'I thought 'twas you. I was wonderin' whether you mightn't run down this mornin'.'

'I'd got it in my heart to come down last night,' said the new-comer, smiling. 'Only I thought that would never do, and it your first evenin', and all.'

'I won't tell you you wouldn't have been welcome;' and Mrs. Coode nodded cordially: 'and I think I may own that that's more than I'd say to any other body.'

Phœbe Rowe, for it was she, showed that she was fully alive to the compliment paid her.

'You're always so kind, Mrs. Coode,' she said. 'When father's praisin' up what I do, I often thinks 'tis to Mrs. Coode his praise is due. I b'lieve Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby is a little bit put out now and then, for father's very outspoken, you know, and he will say what he thinks, and he does think ever so much about you.'

'If your aunts is just in their thoughts of me,

Phœbe, they knows I've never been the one to interfere with or upset anythin' they might have learned you; although there's a right way and a wrong of doin' everything in this world, and—well, I can't say their ways would ever be mine.'

'No, certainly not,' said Phœbe, in a conciliatory tone. 'However, to do 'em justice, they're never the ones to deny that many of the things I do is all along of your showin'. People often goes on about me being so handy, and they can't think how it is, but I could tell 'em, and so could aunts, too.'

'A motherless girl, Phœbe, ought, under the hand of Providence, to be the care of every woman; but there! you can't expect two old maids who never had no children of their own to feel the same as I may. Added to which there's two sorts to try and learn; the one 'll take it all in, and on the other 'tis all throwed away. Nobody can tell that better than I can. I've only to cast my eyes on you and on Loyalty.'

Phœbe heaved a profound sigh. 'Ain't it a thousand pities,' she said; 'and you so kind to her, and all.'

'Well, I don't know about kind,' said Mrs. Coode, whose conscience did not permit her to appropriate anything beyond that she considered her due. 'I've strove to show her her duty, and when I've seed her doin' wrong, she's heard of it from me; but you know, Phœbe, that doesn't suit everyone; there must be good seed in the heart before we can bear to be

told our faults meekly, and that seed hasn't yet found its way to Loyalty George.'

''Tis very disheartenin', though, when anybody's like that; and Loyalty should remember there isn't many as'll take that trouble, and ought to try and learn all she can—a girl with no father nor mother to look to.'

'Well, I don't know that that need be much of a concern to her,' said Mrs. Coode dryly.

'No, I know, not the father; but the mother was different, wasn't she? I s'pose you recollects her? Aunt Tishy says she minds séein' her very well.'

'Oh, I dessay,' said Mrs. Coode stiffly; 'but I was never the one to be runnin' off to these revels and raree-shows they used to have goin' on then. If I was needed for sickness or sorrow, people knew where to find me. I was as great a stay-at-home in them days as I am now.'

'Aunt Tishy,' continued Phœbe, 'don't know that she'd ha' dwelt in her memory so; only when everybody was talkin' up 'bout he bein' hung, and she struck with death at hearin' of it, they recalled her as bein' the one who'd ha' wore the long eardrops to Miss Anne's party.'

Mrs. Coode nodded her head solemnly. 'Yes,' she said, emphasizing her remark by fixing her eyes on Phœbe, 'and them's the same eardrops you may see on Loyalty now;' and, after pausing to allow for due horror at her statement, she added, 'The first time she came into my sight with 'em in, it made my

blood run cold; it seemed downright awful to me for anybody who'd had a parent hung to go and trick theirselves out with things like them in their ears.'

'It might be that she didn't think,' began Phœbe.

'Didn't think!' echoed Mrs. Coode scornfully; 'if so, and she'd no thought for herself, after listenin' to me she know'd what I for one thought of her.'

'And did she seem to mind?'

'Mind! She flew out like a young turkey-cock; and 'twas gabble, gabble, gabble, one word a-top of another, 'bout their bein' her mother's and her gran'-mother's, and I don't know who's; only,' and here Mrs. Coode made a stop, 'I thought I caught the words of their bein' *French*.'

'No?' exclaimed Phœbe—'I never!'

'I don't vouch for it, you know, but I'm pretty sure that's what she said; and I've heard before 'bout the old gran'father bein' thought to be a Jersey man. If 'tis so, why, it's all accounted for, as you may say—her ways and that,' she added in explanation. 'I've heerd my poor husband tell—'twas peace, and he traded to France, you know—how that the women there was as bold as brass, laughin' and singin' and makin' so free; and at night times they'd come all of 'em out into the streets and stand about 'mongst the men, holdin' forth and havin' their say, with long eardrops in their ears and gold trinklets round their necks, but not a bit o' nothin' on their heads, more like a passel o' Liberty Street women than decent females.'

'I expects, then, that that's how it is;' and Phœbe looked contemplative. 'I wonder if many of 'em's like she? All weathers seems the same with her. She's out sunshine or shower, wet or dry. And yet her skin's fairly dazzling; and her eyes, don't she look out of 'em—oh, my!' and Phœbe turned up her own blue orbs, which might have belonged to a wax doll, in a feeble endeavour to convey her rival's expression.

'There! be quiet, do,' exclaimed Mrs. Coode sharply; 'I haven't got no patience with it. I declare 'tis ridic'lous to hear people cryin' up that girl's beauty. "Handsome is as handsome does" was the motto o' my day; but that seems completely lost sight of now.'

Phœbe sat without making any answer.

'She's got of late so much better-lookin',' she said, continuing the subject uppermost in her mind. 'Mr. Yabsley was remarkin' it only last Thursday, when they was up to aunt's, drinkin' tea; he said it didn't seem feasible that a evil heart could go with such an enticin' countenance.'

'Then I'm very sorry I wasn't there, Phœbe, to tell him that such a remark was very out of place in the mouth of a Christian minister. It wouldn't have been the first time, and I dare say it won't be the last, that Mr. Yabsley's heard the truth from me; and there's others I could name as would only be actin' proper if they used the same measure of plain speakin' with Mr. Yabsley that I do—in which case

Mr. Yabsley would be found to be a very different man.'

'Oh, I'm sure when he said it he didn't mean any harm by it,' pleaded Phœbe, perfectly aware that the thrust given was meant for her aunts; 'but we just happened to be talkin' about Roger and his comin' home.'

''Bout Roger!—my son! And what call, I should like to know, was there for mixin' up his name with Loyalty's in any way? Well, I'm sure, 'tis a pity people can't mind their own businesses; it 'ud become 'em far better!'

Phœbe saw that she had committed an error. 'Oh, but, Mrs. Coode,' she said soothingly, 'everybody knows what a interest your Roger takes in her, and that 'twas through his askin' that you've showed yourself so kind since he's been gone. I'm sure I for one have thought ever so much more of him for it—it ain't many young men would have acted that way towards a young girl.'

'My Roger, Phœbe, ain't one of your common order.' Mrs. Coode was a trifle mollified.

'No, I know that. I wonder if he's seed her yet?'

'Seed her! Why, no!' Mrs. Coode was about to exclaim; but at the moment of saying the words something checked her. 'Seed her!' she repeated. 'Good gracious on the maid, why, he only comed home yesterday!'

CHAPTER IX

CHEERED by the sympathy of her staunch friend Dunchy, Loyalty, after leaving Roger on the previous night, hastened towards the despised dwelling that was home to her—the only home she had ever had or known.

'A pig-sty of a place,' Mrs. Coode had called it; and so it had seemed to her conventional, orderly eyes. What a shock would have run through the matron could she have realized, that many who would not have turned their heads to look at her house, with its square, four-windowed, white-washed exterior, would have gone into ecstasy at sight of The Cot, and, in comparison with the glories of her cherished parlour, would have pronounced its single living room—kitchen, workshop, often boat-house, combined—a positive picture.

Jake George had been known as a man who never spared his labour, and in turning the old ruin he had found to serviceable account, he had taxed all his resources.

In early years faults might have been found with the domestic arrangements; but since Loyalty had grown older and money was more plentiful, there was nothing in its cleanliness and little in its comfort to find much fault with.

True, its two inhabitants had been nursed amid

hardships and exposure. The sea was the natural element of both, they regarded it as others do the land; the pebbled shore was their garden, rocks and seaweed were as trees and flowers.

Whenever the old man indulged in the bitterness of reflection, called forth, as it always was, by grudging admiration of his granddaughter, he stirred up the fire of his smouldering hatred by recalling the banishment he had suffered for her mother's sake. For years of Susan's life he had not dared to go near the sea, although the passion to be on it had made him say, 'If I was to die, no shoving me into a pit underground; have a good stone tied to my neck, and put me into a boat. Take her out so far as they'll go, and overboard with me.'

At the time, those who heard him say this regarded it as idle talk in the man; but later on it was raked up and repeated as proof of their suspicions, and evidence of his profanity.

His old wound, although it had left him lame, and therefore safe from the press-gang, as being of no use in the Navy, interfered but little with his dexterity in a boat. Still there were times when he suffered much pain in his leg, and in the shoulder, which had had a thrust in it; and at these periods it was that Loyalty's education had begun.

When it was going to be dirty weather, and a strong south-east wind was on, these pains, and, what was worse, a sort of weakness in the affected limbs, would attack him suddenly. And as it was

mostly at these sorts of times he was depended on, the best thing he could do was to make the 'young baggage' handy.

The first approach to a kind speech which Loyalty could remember her grandfather had ever made her, was after an excursion of this kind; and then, as if in excuse, he had muttered something about a drop of his blood being in her, 'in spite of the father,' and the child's heart had burnt with anger, and she had pushed away the food which, out of reward, he had given her—had she not enough to endure from the children's taunts whenever she went to the village, or they came out to the Bay there, crying after her, 'Gibbet, gibbet,' dancing in front of her, holding a something knotted round their necks, in ghastly caricature of someone hanging? Must even her own grandfather fling this same disgrace at her?

None knew, for there was no one to tell, the indignities thrust upon the hapless outcast. The women, who called their children away if she but drew near, had no thought that they were wounding the sensitive child. Devoid of sentiment or imagination themselves, they credited her with none. Dick, Betsy, Tom, Mary Jane, were told they were to come in and not to keep bad company; and if by chance they rebelled, it was to be warned that they'd better 'mind theyselves' and be good, or else, 'You'll all get hung, like her father was, and then the devil 'll have 'ee.'

The offence for which poor Dick suffered was lost

sight of by many—it might as well have been for housebreaking or murder. In those days the cause little mattered, so long as the poor dangling bones served to rattle and inspire wholesome fear.

'Mother,' Roger Coode had said one day, many years before, when he was a boy, 'if you could but listen to old Jake George's little maid! Oh, ain't she a reg'lar young tiger! And the way she jaws is like anythin'!'

'Does she? What for?'

Mrs. Coode had wished to seem interested in what her son was saying, but did not remove her eyes from her flying needle.

''Cos all the boys and maids about run after her, callin' that her father was hanged, and his bones is danglin' still; and they rattles a noise, you know, and flings mud and stones, and anythin' they can pick up, at her.'

'I hopes you haven't nothin' to do with such?'

Roger did not answer.

Putting down her work, Mrs. Coode said, 'Roger, 'twould grieve my heart sore if I thought my boy, 't 'as pleased Almighty God to make healthy and strong, and gived the blessin's of respectable parents to, was houndin' a poor, weak, miserable child, who can't help in no ways what Satan put into the heart of her father to do, afore ever she saw the light, or drawed the breath of life.'

Roger did not speak.

''Tis the duty of a man, and such a man as I hope

to see you grow to, to stand up for all that is in distress. Your father was no pattern, nor without his faults in many ways; but where a female was concerned, he was as bold as a lion or a British sailor, Roger, which in courage means the same thing.'

'I never throw'd no stones,' said Roger, not meeting his mother's eyes.

'No, I hope not; even the Jews couldn't go that far, though they'd got 'em ready in their hands, and was itchin' to let fling; but when our Saviour said, only if so be they had no sin theirselves, they was forced to turn tail and slink away.'

'Mother,' and Roger raised his head, 'I won't never do it again.'

'That's right, my boy;' and Mrs. Coode said no more.

Some weeks later, Roger had returned to tea, which he partook of in silence. At the end of the meal he said suddenly, 'I gived Joe Ryder a reg'lar wallopin' to-day, mother.'

'You did!' exclaimed Mrs. Coode. 'Why, he's ever so much bigger boy than you!'

'Yes, I know; but he throwed stones, and that, at Jake George's little maid, and I told him to leave off, and he wouldn't. So I said what I'd do, and when he hoved another, I let at un.'

'Come, come,' said the mother, anxious for her boy's safety, 'that won't do. I don't approve of no fightin' one among the other.'

'But you said I was to stand up for her, and see she wasn't put upon.'

Mrs. Coode, like many another mentor, was perplexed between principle and practice.

'Oh, well,' she said, by way of getting out of the difficulty. 'I don't s'pose he'll do it again.'

'No, I don't expect he will. I sent un home with a black eye, and his nose bleedin'.'

'My dear life! Whatever did his mother say?'

'That as soon as it stopped, her'd give un a good hidin' for lettin' hisself be mauled by a little chap like me.'

The philosophy of Mrs. Ryder comforted Mrs. Coode.

'He's a coward, that Joe Ryder,' said Roger. 'I can see through un now.'

'Oh, well, don't you begin braggin',' and Mrs. Coode dropped the subject; but Roger, reminded perhaps by sundry bruises and sore places where the skin was knocked off, said to her later on—

'Is that what you think father 'ud ha' done?'

'Father!'

'Yes; would he ha' tooked a maid's part, and pitched into anybody when he was a boy?'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Coode, 'to that I can't give no answer. I didn't know father when he was a boy, and a good job in some ways if I hadn't knowed him as a man neither; for, 'ceptin' 'twas to leave you to me, Roger, he wasn't much of a comfort as a husband to me.'

Roger asked no more questions, but from that date he felt a more tender interest in this father, who had been brave, and stood up for the weak and those who couldn't fight for themselves, and he resolved that this should be his character. Therefore he rather put himself in the way of meeting Loyalty, that he might have the chance of protecting and defending her.

And when the two came across each other, and none of the tormentors were nigh, the child stopped, eyeing her young champion with the look of a timid, grateful animal, while Roger, with bashful awkwardness, gave her a nod of his head, and then ran away.

The next time they met, a lean arm stretched itself in his direction, its hand offered him a couple of shells, on that coast rarely met with. And after this came a long spell of winter, that year very severe; and the spring was well advanced before the children ventured up on the cliffs again. Then, one day, watching evidently for him, Roger saw Loyalty. She beckoned him over, and displayed to his wondering eyes a tiny young fox, which, covered with the skirt of her frock, she was hiding in her bosom.

The fox was for him; but what could Roger do with it? He could not take it home, his mother would scout the idea; and yet to possess a fox—a fox of his own—the thought was delightful to a boy. She could keep it—she, Loyalty, knew where—and whenever he wanted it she would bring it to him;

it would always be his; and when he could keep it himself, he could have it to take away.

This common interest and secret tended to greatly advance the intimacy; and when the novelty of the fox began to pall, another ambition had come to Roger, the rage for birds' eggs, and Loyalty risked life and limb to rob the nests for him; and Roger, who had begun his sea-life, and was being taught the secrets of his craft by the captain of a barque which went crabbing and pilcharding and piloting about the coast, returned at intervals, short or long, to always find some fresh addition hoarded up by Loyalty which she gave him to add to his store. So the years crept along, he grown a lad, she still a child, the gap between their ages seeming wider than it at first had been. Few noticed the girl, or took any interest in what she did; the evil reputation of her grandfather had become more confirmed. Without doubt he was mixed up with some smuggling transactions to which certain individuals in both villages were known to show favour, especially the landlord of the Cat and Fiddle, Hockaday, generally regarded as go-between for the principal receivers.

Very seldom had Roger been down to The Cot, although in pursuance of his hobby the cliffs on both sides of the river were equally familiar to him. Loyalty also roamed at large over them all; there was not a track or path but was known to her. From her early years she had climbed where others

feared to look over, and she often pointed to places where she had got eggs, the sight of which, when Roger pictured her, a girl, there, made him shudder.

Loyalty was thirteen when she saved Roger's life. The circumstance would have soon passed from her mind, but it was destined to greatly change and give colour to her whole life after. Roger, never effusive or given to say much about his own actions or concerns, although on the evening of its occurrence he mentioned the risk he had run, and the danger he had been in, to his mother, said little more.

Glad of an occasion to point a warning, Mrs. Coode made the most of her opportunity; and her homily being apparently listened to, she considered the matter finished. In giving his narration, Roger had mentioned his rescuer; but of this, except to express wonder, Mrs. Coode had taken no notice. Somewhat surprised, knowing, as she did, her son's character, to find that during several days he continually returned to the same story, repeating some of the incidents, and thereby showing that the event had made an unusual impression on his mind, she was further startled, on accompanying him for a walk, which, on the following Sunday afternoon, he had asked her to take as a favour, to find him leading the way to the spot he had told her of.

'I want you to look over, mother,' and he led her to the brink of the precipice. 'Now—down there—do you see where the ledge over that mound that looks like grass is broken away?—and the slate that

sticks out hangs over the sea? That's where I'd got to, and she hauled me up from——'

Taking in with a glance the danger of the situation, Mrs. Coode's head reeled, she clutched Roger tightly as she drew back terrified.

'My dear, dear boy, s'posin' I'd lost you; oh, what should I do! The Lord forgive me for not feelin' grateful enough to Him. We've never properly bowed the knee in thanks to Him together, Roger.'

'No, I thought you didn't rightly know—and no more we haven't thanked Loyalty; she managed somehow to do it—but if I'd gone, she must have gone too, mother.'

'I'll go to once, right down there, to see her; there's nothin' I can do too much for what she's done. To think,' and she raised her eyes and then shut them tightly, 'I might be childless now! Oh, Lord, Lord, spare me!'

Seeing how this realization of the fact had agitated her, Roger laid his hand soothingly on her shoulder.

'There's no call for you to go down, and anyways you couldn't this afternoon, 'tis too far. She'd think ever so much more if you was to ask her up to see you, and 'twould be much better.'

'Tell her she's to come whenever and as often as she likes to,' said Mrs. Coode heartily.

'You'll have to name a day, or else she won't come at all. She's not been brought up like other folks' maidens, and you mustn't pay no heed to her

ways, or take notice of her clothes, 'cos I know they're poor to what you're accustomed to.'

'Why, how comes it that you know all this?' Mrs. Coode asked the question anxiously, not on account of Loyalty—that thought never occurred to her; but Jake George was a man with a bad name, who was said to keep bad company.

'Oh,' said Roger simply, 'because since that time when I thrashed Joe Ryder for throwin' things at her, she's never forgot, but used to bring me shells and birds, and has saved up eggs, and that. Why, I've often told you, when you've asked me, that "Jake George's little maid got it for me."'

'I dessay; that's the way with me. You often says things, and I'm thinkin' of somethin' else, and pay no attention; but it shows that the poor thing's got a grateful heart, and I'm sure, after this, if there's anythin' that I can do for her, I'll do it, and only too glad to. My dear—oh, Roger! don't ever go to risk your precious life agen; think of your mother.'

''Twas of you I thought then,' he said a little huskily. 'Never fear, I sha'n't ever do the same again—you don't ketch me twice bein' so foolhardy.'

At Roger's entreaty Loyalty consented to go and see his mother, and as some explanation was necessary to account for the advent of such an unusual visitor, the story of Roger's rescue became generally known. Phœbe Rowe was told of it, who told it to Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby; it was spoken of to Mrs. Yabsley, who mentioned it to her husband,

suggesting that an allusion in his sermon on Sunday to 'the only son of his mother, and she a widow,' would be taken kindly.

'And the poor child, what of her?' said Mr. Yabsley.

'Oh, Mrs. Coode's going to have her up to see her.'

'Well, then, let her come here to see me.'

'She's that old George's granddaughter down at The Cot, you know,' explained Mrs. Yabsley hastily; 'a man who's known about for a very evil-liver.'

'Well, Mary, and if so, that doesn't alter the case in any way. About the sheep that are safe in fold the shepherd's mind is easy; the wanderers, my dear, they that are astray, they ought to be his care. The Cot!' and he heaved a sigh—'tis a long time ago—many years—since I was down that way. My heart smites me, recollecting that I've omitted a duty.'

'Now, for goodness gracious sake, Tobias, I hope you won't be foolish, and go piping off there!' Mr. Yabsley was a small, frail man, very delicate and weakly. 'Duty! I can't see why it should be your duty to go to such a out-of-the-way, break-neck place, when the parish has got a rector, and he stout and strong, and fit to do the work of twenty. If such people as that old George chooses to live down there, well, let the rector visit him, then; 'tis hard indeed if, with two horses and a gig, and such

a constitution as he's got, he can't look after somebody.'

Mr. Yabsley smiled indulgently.

'Why, Mary, that's a new theory you've got hold of. Then the chapel is to have the saints, and the church is to take the sinners. No, no; that won't do; I think I'd rather have it the other way about, my dear.'

'Well, have it which way you like,' she said anxiously, 'only don't go over that perishing common to-day; and I'll ask Mrs. Coode about the little girl, and arrange for her to come here. P'r'aps if we all held her out a helping hand, we might make something of her.'

CHAPTER X

It was through the combined efforts of Mrs. Coode, Mrs. Yabsley, and other matrons, that in both villages Loyalty began to be known. Her grandfather, although he affected and desired to sneer at the notice taken of her, could not divest himself of a secret pride and pleasure.

'Here,' he said one day, 'you want a rig out of clothes. Ask some of 'em what they ought to be, and I'll pay the money for it.'

Very timidly Loyalty had begged the advice of Roger's mother—which was Mrs. Coode's claim to her worship and admiration—and the widow had given her every assistance in her power, and had

even disguised the shock received when she discovered that Loyalty was all but ignorant of the use of her needle.

Mrs. Coode first discovered that the girl was not all a girl ought to be, when she found what a task it was for Loyalty to learn to sew; but ready obedience to all she was told to do, and an ear never weary of listening to the praises of 'my son Roger,' made Mrs. Coode for a long time lenient in a measure towards the young girl's failings.

All the time this was going on, Roger came and went—he was mate of a trawler now, and looked on as a man—and when he saw Loyalty, he sometimes patronized and teased her, at other times paid her no notice. The fishing season had been a bad one, very little doing in Ferrers and Fairstoke; the crabbing had barely paid; and it was determined by the owners of some of the larger boats to send them to join the herring fleet on the coast of Scotland. Roger's captain among others elected to go, and Roger went with him. They were absent some months. An accident then happened to the vessel which further detained them, and it was on Roger's return from this prolonged voyage that he found Loyalty had stepped from a child into a woman.

The metamorphosis, which had for long been going on under his eyes, seemed to him suddenly performed by a miracle. She was beautiful; and though she had clothes on such as other maidens wore, she wore hers with a grace seemingly unknown to them.

Instead of going up as he always had, Roger seemed to lack the assurance to approach her; it was Loyalty who had all the self-possession, and Roger's ensnared love fancied she desired to keep him at a distance. Following on this came hot fits of jealousy, for other eyes besides Roger's were open to Loyalty's beauty. The bucolic admiration only showed itself in an open-mouthed stare and an inability to express its feelings; but there was another element in the neighbourhood far more dangerous—some few ne'er-do-weels, who had seen more of the world, and had learnt to use their tongues, and seize their opportunities.

It was against these admirers that Mrs. Coode was the first to give warning, and Loyalty with good-humour laughed at her mentor's fears.

Warn her against listening to the love of any man, when the one who had filled her heart when she was a tiny child was wholly and entirely enthroned there, and that one the speaker's own son! Oh, if it was not for bashfulness, coyness, maiden shame, she had it in her to fling her arms around the widow's neck, and tell her how she worshipped Roger.

And while these thoughts were going on she smiled; and Mrs. Coode, who didn't approve of 'smilin' when the word of warnin' was being given,' said, in a tone which showed she was displeased, 'There ain't no call to titter and laugh, Loyalty; that ain't at all pretty behaviour when I'm speakin';' and thus the little rift began which was to stretch

out into a widening gulf, the instant the mother had a suspicion that the arrow of love was pointing at her son.

As is the case in all communities, those placed on pedestals must enjoy much of their glory alone. Mrs. Coode, the pattern housewife, mother, neighbour, had few friends who really loved her; if they wanted advice or had sickness in their homes, they sought her. The doctor, in cases of danger, called her his right hand; the rector, in a house of mourning, invariably asked, 'Where's Mrs. Coode?' But never was it known that any penitent, heartsore and weary, any mother quivering over a frail, prodigal, headstrong child, took her burden to Hepzibah Coode. She was devoid of pity for those who deviated from her standard of right and wrong, and denounced that love weak which many sins failed to destroy. Having given her opinion of other young men, and shaken her head that Loyalty should be seen with them—'a girl whose forecomin's ought to make her so careful and partickler'—it was honey to several, hitherto forced to submit to Mrs. Coode's stings, to drop in their turn a little gall into her ear. They were surprised, they said, to see her Roger about so much with Loyalty George as he was. They supposed it would end in the two keeping company. They wouldn't have expected that Mrs. Coode would have cared for it; if it had been their case, they should have been in a fine ways about their sons.

In any matter in which her neighbours could triumph over her, or try to fling an accusation at her boy, Mrs. Coode possessed the courage and endurance of a Spartan.

She could well understand, she replied, what a worry it would have been to those who were speaking to her; and only right that they should have felt anxiety, for few young men were what her Roger was; and when your trust had been broken, you did wise not to place it again. She humbly thanked the Lord that was not her case. Roger, as boy and man, had never given her one uneasy hour. She could trust him as well out of her sight as in it; and if those around had forgotten the debt of gratitude owed to Loyalty by her and her son, she was glad to say that neither he nor she had let it slip their memory, and she wished them a good evening, and walked indoors.

But the grain of seed had been sown—the birds of the air were already pecking at the fruit it bore. Mrs. Coode saw the risk Roger ran, and that she as his mother must warn him.

And that evening she spoke very plainly and sensibly to her son, and Roger listened patiently, but he gave her no answer: and by that the mother knew that the neighbours' talk was not without foundation, and that the shadow of a trial, such as she had never dreamed of, was hovering over her.

How she watched, after this, his coming-in and going-out, while seeming to pay no heed to him!

She could have told to a mouthful whether he ate with his usual appetite, and not a shade on his countenance was lost on her. And while this surveillance was going on, Roger, racked and torn, was fighting the conflict between love and duty; until, on the evening of a day the whole of which he had been absent from home, he announced to her that he had gone to Plymouth and had entered on board a King's ship; that he should be, he fancied, absent two years, and they were to sail in about a fortnight's time.

Mrs. Coode, in spite of her anguish at parting with him, stifled her regret and forced back her tears, offering up thanks that her prayers had been heard, and her son vouchsafed strength to tear himself away.

But the emotion to which she denied its natural outlet seemed to give strength to a new feeling which took possession of her—dislike, amounting to hatred, of Loyalty—a deep, bitter jealousy of the first living creature who had ever disputed with her her son's heart.

She had long known and realized the struggle it would one day cost her to love and give welcome to a daughter-in-law, and this a daughter-in-law of her own creation, a model being, who would live by her rules, and clean and cook by her recipes; but to be ousted by a girl such as Loyalty, the object of pity to a few, the object of scorn to many! 'It can't be,' she exclaimed passionately, as she sat alone with her sorrow, 'that after all these years, standin' as I

do, respected, looked up to, I'm to be dragged down in my old days by his matin' himself with such as she! Why, the dangle of the father's body would be ever before my eyes, and the rattle of the gibbet chains in my ears! Oh, it must be a judgment on me; I ought never have mixed myself up with such limbs of Satan. I don't doubt now but 'twas through his power she went down after him that day.'

Mrs. Coode could not bring herself to say she wished he had been let fall over; but she muttered, 'Follow him to his grave—yes, before I'd see him marry her; twenty times I'd rather!'

So that when Roger, with a suspicion of what was working within her, asked, at the hour of parting his mother to cast an occasional eye on Loyalty, Mrs. Coode had to what she called 'put it to herself' before she could give an answer.

'There's no reason why you shouldn't do so; and,' he added, with his head half turned away, ''twould be better, and more what I should like, that both of us shouldn't seem to draw off from her at once.'

Believing that she thoroughly understood Roger's nature, Mrs. Coode joyfully interpreted the explanation. Truthful to the backbone, her son, she knew, would not deceive her. He had grasped this fancy with a firm hand, resolved to root it from his bosom, and by this request he showed that he did not desire that Loyalty should even suspect its existence.

'You may trust to me, Roger,' said the mother. 'I'll do what is fair by her.'

During the years of Roger's absence, Mrs. Coode considered she had acted in strict accordance with the promise given. She had done that which was fair by Loyalty; but oh, it was justice without mercy. Not a folly escaped her condemnation; the light-heartedness of the girl was sinfulness, her gaiety was forwardness, every remark she made drew down a rebuke, and Roger's very name was tabooed.

Mrs. Coode was a poor diplomatist; she very soon discovered to those about her the game she was playing, and Loyalty was not long in finding out that the bitterest enemy she had was Roger's mother.

Love seldom calls judgment to its aid, and a girl brought up as Loyalty had been had no guide but the promptings of a very unruly nature. By turns wounded, infuriated, mortified by Mrs. Coode's treatment, she resolved and succeeded in aggravating, defying, and shocking her. Others, too, were shocked by the reckless conduct of the young girl, in whom everything bad came to the surface; the things she did were commented on, the things she said disapproved of, the words she used repeated, and Loyalty had the drawback of a ready tongue, with often a very rough edge to it.

Without anyone to give her a word of warning, never a soul speaking comfort, guidance, advice, the only love offered her given by those she shrank from or despised, the girl's whole faith, heart, hope was set on Roger. She dated everything from the day he left, and fixed everything for the day when he would return.

At length this joyful day had arrived. Roger was again back home. Loyalty had seen him, they had met, with the result which has been already shown. Loyalty's whole happiness seemed overthrown, and her love buried beneath the ruin.

Hurrying along, after parting at the ferry with Dunchy, she moaned drearily as she went, 'He doesn't no longer love me; he doesn't no longer care;' and then a sudden flame of anger would leap up within her, and she would cry, ''Tis his mother, 'tis all her doin's; she 'tis has set him agenst me, because o' Phœbe Rowe—Phœbe!' and she sighed disconsolately; 'them's the sort that men cares to go after—they as has got friends and a father respectable and well-to-do, with a proper home to ask 'em into. What have I go'?' and she lifted up her streaming eyes. 'Nothin' to offer, nothin' to give, only my own self, and a heart that's willin' to die for his love. All my belongin's could but drag him down.'

Overwhelmed by the immeasurable distance which, like some great gulf, had suddenly divided them, the girl stood stunned, until, recollecting the necessity for her return, she ran on quicker than she had yet done.

Half-way down the zig-zag path she sprang on to a jutting rock, from which, by bending over, The Cot could be seen, distinguishable now by the light thrown out from its window. There were a few minutes of irresolution, a movement forward, a halt; and then, overmastered by her emotion, she hastily turned, and clambered up to the perilous-looking

green mound called the Pulpit Rock, which juts out from above.

'''Tain't of no use tryin',' she exclaimed, as, reaching the top, she flung herself down; 'I can't go in. If e'er a one of 'em spoke a word while I was this ways, I should do somethin' desperate, I knows.'

With her elbows on the grass, her two hands supporting her chin, she let her hot eyes rest on the sea. How smooth, how calm, how peaceful all looked around! Alone the moon still sailed in silvery glory, marking her way by a luminous trail of light. The sky was densely blue, a faintly visible star twinkling here and there.

Up, beyond, further than eyes could see, was Heaven—the Heaven that when good people died they went to! A burst of scalding tears fell on the grass below. Oh that she had had some one to teach her to be good—to give her hope of one day dwelling there! The quivering lips were dumb, the upraised eyes half-blinded still, the bosom rent by sobs, as in her great humility she ventured to offer up a prayer. And after a time her head sunk on the turf; and nestled there, she lay quiet and calm, until roused by the sound of voices coming from below. Then she got up, but waited to descend until the visitors at The Cot had gone on their way home.

Stealing past her grandfather, who, if he saw her, made no sign, Loyalty reached her own room, went quickly to bed, and was soon in an untroubled sleep, from which she did not awake until morning.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Roger left his mother, under the plea of conveying comfort to the family of his dead friend, he was in anything but an enviable frame of mind. He was ajar with himself and out of tune, and as he went along he did nothing but censure his conduct and heap on himself fresh reproach.

It had been a sore task to keep up before his mother, listen to what she said, and answer her questions; and added was the feeling that he was repaying her love by deceiving her, that while she was rejoicing at his return, he was preparing for her disgrace and misery. Mechanically he took the direction towards the Edmonds' cottage, up the shore slip, up the steps and into the road, along which he was walking, when, emerging from a lower path, a lady met him. She was young-looking, had a sweet face, and a winning voice and manner.

'What, Roger!—Roger Coode! Is it you? Are you home? When did you come?'

'Yesterday, miss;' and Roger clasped the little hand held out to him. 'I asked mother about you, whether she'd seen you lately or no, miss, and she said you'd been away.'

'I have, for two months—that's a long time, all at once, for me. But you—you must have been gone two years and more, haven't you?'

'Yes, miss, pretty nigh three.'

'I thought so. Now tell me: in all the places you have seen, is there any better worth looking at than Ferrers and Fairstoke?'

'No, that there isn't!' said Roger heartily; 'and I don't believe there is no places, neither—not to beat them, nor to be their fellow.'

Miss Anne Hamlyn laughed pleasantly.

'That's right, and what I like to hear a sailor say. They ought all to be true, Roger—true to their native place and the girls they leave behind them. But I don't think, though, you *did* leave one; did you?'

'I left a good many, miss,' said Roger sheepishly.

'Ah, yes,'—with a shake of her head—'but a good many isn't the same as *one*. However, there's plenty of time for that, isn't there? You are so much better off than many—a good home, and a good old mother to come back to.'

'Yes, miss, that's true.'

'Oh, your mother's a pattern, an excellent woman—I don't know what we should do in the village without her. She's quite our stand-by—so clever, and sensible, and respected by everybody. You'll have to look out for a wife of the same sort, you know, Roger. Indeed, I'm not so sure but that Mrs. Coode has already got her eye on somebody.'

Roger felt as if his heart was being stuck with thorns. 'I'm sure, miss, I hope not; I don't take it that I'm one of the marryin' order.'

'No?—Oh, but that won't do. I'm an old maid myself, but I'm a great advocate of matrimony; and we haven't so many men about that we can afford to spare you. You'll tell your mother that I shall come and see her.' She was about to turn away, when, struck by a fresh idea, she said, 'I suppose you haven't yet seen our old friend Loyalty?'

Miss Anne named her 'our old friend,' because at the time of Roger's rescue, when Mrs. Coode told her the story, she also told her of the former incidents which had led to the boy's intimacy with the friendless child; and Miss Anne, deprived of showing the little waif any kindness by old George's ferocity, could not say enough in praise of Roger's chivalry.

'Oh, Mrs. Coode, to think of those wretched, wretched children ill-treating and tormenting the poor child, and Roger taking her part, and fighting that great Joe Ryder! I call it noble in the boy; but I hadn't an idea that it would have entered into the minds of children to make the past a reason for separating themselves from her.'

'What, not in the matter of playin' together?' Mrs. Coode had made answer. 'Oh, Miss Anne! there I must differ with you. 'Tis true I wouldn't lend no countenance to ill-usin' her, but that decent-brought-up-children should mix with such—never!'

'But, Mrs. Coode, you're going to have her to see you now?'

'True! and for the reason that Providence, as you

may say, has throwed her in my way; but if you ask me if 'tis what I strictly approve of, or should have of my own accord seeked out, I answer, No. To my mind in the matter, already Mr. Yabsley's run too much ahead. 'Twas quite a subject I had to put before the Lord before I saw my way clear.'

'But now you *do*, Mrs. Coode—you are going to be kind to the girl, I know; and you must let me help in some little way—no one but ourselves need know—because of her saving Roger—he's such a favourite of mine! Think, if anything had happened to him! What would have become of you?'

'Ah, what indeed!' said the widow. 'Th' Almighty's dealt very mercifully with me, and I trust He sees that my heart's properly grateful.'

Later on, without enlarging much on the matter to Roger, Miss Anne presented the lad with a handsome silk neckerchief, saying she gave it to him for his courage and generosity. 'I love courage in a boy, and to see him taking the part of the weak and friendless.'

Knowing to what she alluded, Roger looked very shamefaced and shy, and stood twisting the handkerchief awkwardly; but for all that he was very pleased with his present, and the recognition of his merits by one whose praise was valued highly; and after this, when he met Miss Anne, and she would say, 'Well, Roger, and how is our little friend?' Roger knew that it was Loyalty she meant.

And now she had put to him a similar question,

asking had he yet seen her? To tell an untruth to Miss Anne was impossible.

'I met her up atop, miss, yesterday.'

'Oh, you did? Well, and what do you think of her—grown up into quite a beauty, isn't she?'

Roger evaded giving an answer by saying hesitatingly, 'I was sorry to hear from mother that her conduct hadn't been all it should be of late.'

'Oh, Roger, you mustn't judge too severely!'

Roger had been speaking with his eyes cast down; he raised his head instantly.

'I know Mrs. Coode fancies there is cause for blame.'

'I don't believe she is—not a really bad girl.'

Roger was resolved to put his fears to the test.

'Bad? Oh, no!—no one has accused her that far. She is reckless, headstrong, carried away by her high spirits, and a little, I dare say, by her vanity; and really that is not to be wondered at, for she is very lovely, and has a voice, they tell me, like a nightingale. Well, these are great temptations, you must allow.'

'Mother spoke somethin' about her bein' heard singin' at Hockaday's?'

'Yes, I know; and I know your mother thinks very badly of the Hockadays; but I don't know that we can expect Loyalty to share that opinion. Indeed, the poor child said, when taxed with going there, that Mrs. Hockaday was the only person who treated her in a kind, motherly way. She has her failing, we know; but she's not an altogether bad woman, that

Mrs. Hockaday; added to which, I hear she would be only too glad to see Loyalty marry that scapegrace son. I don't wonder; I believe it's his only chance; and they tell me he worships Loyalty.'

'Oh! does he?'

'Yes; I know you would not like to see it, neither should I; but what is the poor girl to do? You respectable young men wouldn't marry her; and is she to be left there with that disreputable old grandfather, everybody ready to blame her, and no one to hold out a helping hand? Come, Roger, come, try what you can do. I feel, with good Mr. Yabsley, that a little kindness and forbearance would do so much more than this continual rebuke and censure; and you always had so much influence with her, and I'm certain that her nature is good; so do, Roger, try—you will, won't you? She's sure to listen to you. I remember your mother saying how she'd follow you about as a child, making little grateful offerings of shells and birds' eggs to you.'

'Yes; she used to do that.' What a fool he was. Miss Anne would notice it directly; but he had a lump in his throat that seemed like to choke him.

'It is so easy to condemn,' said Miss Anne gravely; 'and we have all been so foolish. I'm sure I can speak for myself, that I have; for you know, Roger, *I* was once eighteen.'

Roger blinked his eyes to rid them of that moist feeling, and got down the lump with an effort.

'Was you really, miss?' he said.

'Yes, really,' and Miss Anne smiled a little sadly, 'impossible as it may now seem.'

'You couldn't ha' bin more beautiful or more good, miss,' said Roger earnestly: and it was now Miss Anne's eyes that grew dim.

'Thank you, Roger, thank you! Then we understand each other;' and, shaking him by the hand, the little lady passed him and went on her way.

'Miss Anne's a angel,' soliloquized Roger, emphasizing his remark by a nod of the head as he looked up to the sky. 'I don't believe, exceptin' the wings, there's any difference between her and them that's in heaven now.'

A load seemed lifted off the poor fellow; the way that had seemed before so dark was lighted up with hope; the oppression, despondency had rolled like a cloud away, and, though far from cheerful, his mood was altered for the better.

Love—great love—is seldom vanquished long; it soon gathers strength again. Already Roger's was weaving a thousand plans—what he would do, what he would say to Loyalty and to his mother. He saw now that the girl had been hardly dealt with; that there she stood alone, without a friend. Setting aside all question of love, Roger was exceedingly firm on this point; he would just do what Miss Anne had asked of him, and beg and pray of Loyalty to be more particular; and he'd ask his mother for his sake to make another trial of her, and get Miss Anne to join her entreaties to his—and Mr. Yabsley, per-

haps he'd drop in a word. Ah! there was something like a good Christian minister for you! He wished he could think of something he could do for Mr. Yabsley; and as for that young vagabond, Ted Hockaday, he hoped he might yet have the chance of punching his head. With which amiable aspiration Roger entered the cottage belonging to the mother of his deceased friend.

The detailed narrative of the sufferings of the martyred Charlie having been duly listened to and gloried in, Roger took his leave, loaded with the gratitude of his hearers for having placed them so far above the common crowd of mourners. Many in Fairstoke mourned over relatives whose deaths were exalted by the details of their previous sufferings; but that one individual should unite in his person the taking off of both his legs, having his collar-bone set, and his shoulder-blade put in, was unparalleled, and gave a precedence to the Edmonds family which it would not be easy to wrest from them.

'If he'd been killed outright,' said the proud mother, weeping, 'why, there it 'ud ha' been; but to have his dear limbs sawed off, only to lie in the coffin beside him, would melt a heart o' stone.'

CHAPTER XII

ROGER reached home in excellent time for dinner, to find his mother waiting on the tip-toe of expectation.

'What do 'ee think?' she said, hardly giving him

time to get in; 'I've got a invitation for you—and I've said you'll go—so I hope you will.'

'Where's it to?'

'Well, 'twas like this.' (After the fashion of dwellers in remote places, where few events disturb the even tenor of their days, Mrs. Coode took pleasure in giving all the details.) 'Your back was scarcely turned, when in comes Phœbe Rowe. She sat chattin' a little time, and then I'd got to run round to Barrett's, and she walks so far with me and then said good-bye to me. I said good-bye to her. I come home, and my things is hardly off when down she is again—how she did it I can't tell, for it's a fairish step up to Greentree and back again—and this time to say her father had come home, and 'twas his wish that she'd ask you and me up to spend the evenin' with 'em.'

Arrived at the delivery of the invitation, Mrs. Coode had slackened her rate of speech, so that she might give the message its full measure of importance.

'H'm!' said Roger. 'Well, then, I'd sooner his wish had veered round in some other direction.'

'Oh, my dear, don't 'ee say that now, cos I've told 'em you'll come, and Phœbe's up to her eyes gettin' the things ready.'

The expression on Roger's face increased in discontent.

'I don't so much mind Phœbe, but the old Lucas Rowe I can't abear.'

'Now, Roger, don't speak foolish.' In Mrs. Coode's tone there was a suspicion of asperity. 'It isn't to say because you had a dislike to Mr. Rowe when you was a lad, that you should have the same now you'm a man. People changes as they grows older.'

'Yes, but not old Rowe.'

Mrs. Coode drew her lips in tighter.

'All I know is, it's placin' me very awk'ard, and Phœbe been so kind as she has. I'm sure I couldn't have had more attentions from her if I'd bin her own mother. Comin' for me at night-times to take me to chapel, and seein' me home, 'tisn't what you look for in a young girl to a woman o' my years; and I did think, Roger, you'd feel grateful to her for such care to your mother.'

'And so I do—it's only my talk. I'll go up there all right with ye, and tuck into old Rowe's vittals and swill his liquor, if that's what he wants of me.'

And Roger gave a comical twist of his face, as if aware that those were two requirements which would not afford his host pleasure.

'I can tell 'ee,' said Mrs. Coode, restored to good humour, 'that 'tisn't everybody he asks to his house. Phœbe was sayin' that when he walked in and come out with it, all of a suddent, you might have knocked her down with a feather, she was that taken aback.'

'Poor soul! She don't get much chance of gettin' a young man, then, gived to her, if she's got to wait till the father asks him to hang up his hat.'

'I expects when the father sees the husband for her that he wants he can give his invitation to him, like another man.' Mrs. Coode spoke significantly. 'But there! 'taint wait till you'm asked, with a passel o' fellows who knows a girl 'ull have a tidy sum o' money. Phœbe Rowe needn't stand with a finger in her mouth cos no beaux hasn't come her way. That I can tell you.'

'It seems she's hard to please, then.'

'Sensible maidens as is worth their salt always was, Roger, and always will be; I wasn't got by asking once, twice, nor three times, neither.'

'Why, what a hard-hearted one you was, to be sure!' said Roger, laughing.

'And hard-hearted I remained, till your poor father got over me; and then I was soft, when 'twould ha' been better not to be. He's dead and gone, poor soul; but if ever two was paired and not matched, 'twas he and me.'

'And better so,' said Roger, always disposed to take his father's part. 'I think a little o' opposite sorts in marriage is more likely to agree than a pair that's the ditto one of the other.'

'Well, there's two sides to that opinion; it don't do for one to be bent on climbin' up the hill, and t'other one set on draggin' everythin' down. Ah, my dear, you'll never know, and well you shouldn't, all I passed through in my early days—my troubles was many and bitter. I've well earned, I can tell you, peace and quiet for my gray hairs.'

Roger felt the conversation had got into a channel which it was not desirable to pursue; so, after observing the pause he thought his mother would deem befitting her melancholy retrospect, he asked, 'And at what time are we supposed to be ready to go to this place?'

'Oh, not too early; about four, shall we say?'

'All right; four let it be, then.'

Greentree, which was the name given to the house which Mr. Rowe had turned from almost a barn into a very pretty dwelling-place, stood out of the village, near the church, at the top of the hill.

Strangers approaching Ferrers from the Yealmpton side always stopped to admire the house, and often to inquire to whom it belonged.

'Old Lucas Rowe,' they were told; 'he as owns the buildin'-yard down by the river-side. A well-to-do man now, but when he first entered Ferrers he hadn't but a penny in his pocket to pay the ferry.' This in Ferrers tallied with the traditional half-crown with which millionaires are spoken of as arriving in London. The truth being that Lucas Rowe, a sharp, hard-headed, not over-scrupulous man, had resolved to get on in life. This resolution could not be dignified by the name of ambition, because Rowe would have been content to remain a rag-picker so that he was making money by the employment. Money was his aim, his life, his god—he was as careful over a penny now as he had been in the days when he had barely

another to rub against it—a narrow, calculating, money-grubbing nature, who never gave except where he would get more given in return, and who had a motive in every action.

To the gentry around, or to those well-to-do and wanting nothing from him, he was cap in hand and cringing; but to the labourer, to those he employed, he was a hard, grinding task-master. It had entered into this calculating brain that Roger Coode was a young fellow worth looking after; his mother had given him more book-learning than many round had had, and it was in this that Lucas felt himself wanting. He could not keep his figures properly, and having begrudged the money to get his daughter taught, she was now of no help to him.

Roger, in addition to his head for figures, had an eye for timber, was a practical sailor man, and knew the working of things. It was just somebody of this sort that Rowe stood in need of; 'why shouldn't Roger and Phœbe make it up to keep company together, and he come into the business and lend a hand at it? He'd have an interest in the affair without wanting to share in the money; or if he did want, want he might—there'd be the wages agreed on, and nothing more. They must wait, as he'd done; they couldn't marry before he was gone; and then what was left would, he supposed, go to his daughter'—and the miser sighed to think he must leave his precious gains behind him.

It was this motive that had prompted the invita-

tion so unexpectedly given to Mrs. Coode and her son. Of late Rowe had been more than usually bothered by his accounts. A purchaser, sharp as himself, had managed to get the better of him, and all because he couldn't bring his books to prove it; could he have done so, to use his own logic, 'instead o' not bein' paid at all, he'd ha' got the money twice out of un.'

Unable to master his discontent at seeing the hospitable preparations his daughter was engaged in, and having no answer to give to her assertion that 'you couldn't ask folks without givin' 'em enough to satisfy 'em,' his next idea was, 'Who else did they owe anythin' to? Cos, if so, they'd better come; then the one set out wud do, and the cost be but little more.'

Phœbe hesitated. 'I'm afeard if it comes to the ears of Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby,' she said, 'they'll be reg'lar niffed if they'm left out; and if we asks them'—and she let her eyes run over the provision made—'why not the Yabsleys? What they two eats never falls heavy on anythin'.'

Mr. Rowe was well aware that for the matter he had in prospect it would be better that Roger should be entertained alone; but his meanness far outstripped his judgment, and the thought of having to pay for similar preparations a second time decided the question.

The invitations were therefore delivered and accepted.

In all the glory of her best black gown, Roger carrying her cap in a bag which he was cautioned not to swing, Mrs. Coode reached the cottage at the appointed time.

'"Tis the parlour we'm to be took into,' she said, turning round to her son, who, remembering the habits of the family, was confounding the gate he felt compelled to fasten. 'I can see the fire's lighted there.'

'Oh Lord!' groaned Roger dismally; 'dressed to death, and taken out to tea, I calls this, mother.'

'"Sh! 'sh!' said his mother rebukingly; for Phœbe was already at the door.

'Come in, Mrs. Coode, do! Oh, Roger!' and here the blushes which spread over Phœbe's face seemed to put a stop to any further welcome from her. 'If you'll go in there,' and she pushed open the parlour door, 'I'll take Mrs. Coode upstairs with me. You'll find father inside; or, if not, only them as you already knows.'

Roger was half-way in when Mrs. Coode made a snatch at the cap-bag, and in so doing caught sight of the faces of the two aunts.

'Oh, Phœbe!' she said reproachfully, proceeding upstairs as she spoke; 'I wish you'd ha' told me you was expectin' company. If so, I don't know as Roger would have come.'

'No, now, Mrs. Coode, you mustn't talk that way. 'Tis only Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby, and Mr. and Mrs. Yabsley; and you don't count they company, do you?'

'Well, 'tis more than I expected to see.'

Phœbe tip-toed over and softly closed the door; then coming close to the chair in which, to recover her breath, the widow was seated, she said in a low tone, 'And to tell you the honest truth, 'tis more than I care to have here—but you know how aunts is, how jealous-minded they both can be. I s'pose that if they heard that you and Roger was here, and they not invited, the house wouldn't have held 'em after; and then, through they, 'twould have got to the Yabsleys, and there'd ha' bin another offence. So I says to myself, "Well, there's one thing I know, and that is Mrs. Coode would be the last to bring about dissensions in families—and I *can* speak to her!"—and that's how they was asked here.'

Oh, it isn't that it makes any such great differ'nce to me.' Mrs. Coode was not displeased at the importance of being an object of jealousy.

'And Roger's so much thought of by everybody,' pleaded Phœbe.

'You needn't tell that to me,' said the proud mother—'dear fellow; 'tisn't that he objects to company—not in no way—but Roger's a reg'lar home bird, you know, Phœbe, and 'ud rather be sittin' by his mother's fireside than he'd be anywheres.'

Phœbe sighed and smiled sympathetically, and the old lady's toilette being made to her satisfaction, the two descended to the parlour

CHAPTER XIII

If Mrs. Coode's room was formal and commonplace, it had at least some character about it, and was homely. The furniture was a trifle severe, and ponderously heavy; but the walls were adorned with pictures representing various interests in life—'The Sailor's Return,' 'The Soldier's Farewell,' a ship in full sail, made out of bits of coloured cloth and thrums—the handiwork of some artistic mariner—various souvenirs in the shape of shells and stuffed birds, treasured as belonging to Roger; a corner cupboard, in which stood some valued glass and china—heirlooms which had descended to Mrs. Coode from the cousin who had left her the 'bit o' property' which enabled her to pass her present days in ease and comfort.

But this room of the Rowes'! Little wonder that Roger sat on the extreme edge of his chair, feeling a martyr.

Its atmosphere was that of a vault, so seldom did it know a fire—which, in the present instance, might have comfortably filled a moderate-sized basin. On the walls—that the paint might not be injured—not a picture hung. The glories of the Kidderminster carpet were hidden, wherever a foot could fall, under strips of linen drugget, which, not being fastened down, so that they might be the more easily shaken, served as snares to trip up the unwary.

Motives of economy had prevented any interference with the original height of the ceiling, which was so low that Roger was reminded of being between decks again. The high price of glass had diminished the just proportions of the window, and the ivy and myrtle—the only things at Greentree permitted to indulge in extravagance—spread out and intertwined so luxuriantly, that although the hour was early, the assembled guests could hardly see each other.

Roger often recalled that evening at Greentree as the longest he had ever spent, and he would sometimes say the most uncomfortable.

For some unknown reason the two aunts and Mrs. Coode kept up an intercourse of civil warfare, attributed by the vulgar to the desire of both to be 'cock of the walk,' and neither deigning to give way.

With Mr. Yabsley Mrs. Coode was in a state of smothered displeasure on account of the leniency he showed towards Loyalty.

Mrs. Yabsley, content to sit unnoticed herself in a corner, was a great stickler for proper attention being paid to her husband as the minister; and knowing the meekness and modesty of the good man, she felt it incumbent on her to be always blowing his trumpet.

Had his wife not taken up the cudgels for him, the thrusts often made at Mr. Yabsley would have passed unnoticed. Tender to failings, kindly-dispositioned, having very sharp eyes for the good in every one, and rather blind to the evil, it never

occurred to him that any one could mean to wound him. But his wife saw the point of the sword before it was well out of the scabbard, and she at once buckled to, ready for the fray.

'What a talk there is about the young man as took the pulpit for Mr. Axworthy!' Mrs. Coode began, knowing that one weakness of the minister's wife was her inability to place faith in the talents of any other preacher. The tea was over, and conversation was beginning to flow. 'They tells me,' continued her aggravator, 'that during the sermon a pin couldn't ha' dropped without your hearin' it, and when 'twas concluded, in the whole chapel there wasn't a dry eye. That's what I call enterin' into yer congregation; there's too little o' that in the present day.'

A glance at Mrs. Yabsley told Phœbe that mischief was brewing, and she hastened to avert the storm by asking Mrs. Coode what was this orator's name.

'Penberthy, they say.'

'Oh, Penberthy, is it?' said Aunt Tishy, with the air of one who makes a discovery; 'then depend on it, Tabby, 'tis the same one you mean. And if so' —and she looked at Mrs. Coode exultantly— ''Lizabeth Ryder's aunt has sot under him for years.'

''Lizabeth Ryder's aunt's done nothin' o' the kind,' retorted Mrs. Coode indignantly. 'No, now, Miss Tishy,' for the lady was about to protest, 'I knows exactly who 'tis you means—a short, stout, pock-

fridden man, and his name is Penberthy too; but not he I was speakin' of, who's a tall, genteel young man, very delicate they say, and like to go off consumptive.'

'Ah, then,' sighed Aunt Tabby, who, privileged by 'labouring under a complaint,' felt her turn had come to drop a word in season, 'if he enjoys bad health, nobody knows better than I do that none need to envy him.'

'Envy him, Miss Tabby!' said Mrs. Yabsley, whose bristles had already begun to rise; 'I don't know what should make you use that word and look this way. If you mean Mr. Yabsley, I can only say that during sermons he's preached—I'm not speaking of here—there's persons have been carried out of the chapel in fits.'

'Not through listening to me, I trust, Mary, my dear,' said her husband, smiling at her. 'That would be a sad result indeed.'

'Well, Tobias, you know quite well what I mean.'

Mr. Yabsley shook his head while uttering a meek 'No,' and Mrs. Coode, in a decided tone, gave it as her opinion 'that people as was afflicted with fits oughtn't to go to a place o' worship at all, as they got no good theirselves, and only caused a uproar among others.'

Roger, somewhat perplexed and utterly disconcerted by the discord of the parties assembled, thought to throw oil on the troubled waters by thanking Phœbe for her attention to his mother.

'She's been tellin' me,' he said, 'how kind you was in takin' her to chapel and seein' her back home.'

Phœbe blushed with pleasure to the roots of her hair. 'Oh, I'm sure, Roger——' she began, but Aunt Tishy interrupted her.

'All I can say is, 'tis what she didn't do to her own aunts. But there! that needn't surprise nobody; for you often gets more attention paid you by strangers than you ever gets from them related to you.'

'Come, come, Miss Tishy,' said Mr. Yabsley slyly, 'you forget that you haven't got a fine, handsome son coming home from sea. That makes all the difference with young maidens, I can tell you; and so can Mrs. Coode, too.'

'After all,' thought Mrs. Coode, 'Mr. Yabsley was not a bad-meanin' man;' and she smiled back at him more cordially than she had before done that evening.

The smile was not lost on Aunt Tishy. 'If you means by that,' she said, 'to accuse my niece—as has two aunts comfortably off, and her father well-to-do, and she the only one in the family to leave it all to—of runnin' after young men, Mr. Yabsley, I wonders at you, that I do; and I wonders at her father, who can sit there dumb without speakin' a word! If 'twas her poor mother's case, and she'd bin spared to be alive'—here her voice grew duly lachrymose, and was a signal to Aunt Tabby to screw up her eyes—'twould ha' cut her to the 'art, that it would, to hear such a thing brought against her child!'

'There, now, don't answer her,' exclaimed Mrs. Coode; ''tain't worth wastin' words upon. I declare I haven't got common patience with such, that I haven't—a passel o' old maids as wouldn't never get married theyselves, and wants to shut young girls up in glass cases. It's ridicklos, that's what 'tis. Roger, my dear, what's the time?'

'Past eight. Was you thinkin' it's time to be goin'?' and Roger jumped off his seat with alacrity.

'No, now,' said Phœbe, distressed on Roger's account at the want of harmony, which was not infrequent in the limited circle she moved in; 'you've got to have some spirits-and-water before you go. Father, take it out of the cupboard behind you, and put it on the table, and I'll go and bring in the kettle.'

Any diversion seemed to Roger acceptable. The dulness, the wrangling, the stolid silence of old Rowe, who, after saying, 'How do 'ee find yerself?' 'What's goin' on?' 'Heard any news, eh?' to each of his guests in turn, had not spoken again, were insupportable; added to which, since his meeting with Miss Anne, he had been longing, thirsting, yearning for sight of Loyalty. Would she go again to their meeting-place? What should he say to her?—how begin?

Earlier in the evening, during tea, when the elders were talking on subjects about which they were more in unity, Roger's thoughts strayed away, until he lost himself entirely—forgot where he was; and recovered to find himself sitting with his eyes fixed on

Phœbe, who was the colour of a peony under his supposed scrutiny.

The bustle of setting out the glasses, seeing that the kettle was boiling, and making the grog, seemed to in some degree restore good-humour—tongues were found again, and conversation began; even old Rowe was heard speaking. To everyone he saw helping themselves to spirit he said, 'There's the water,' pushing the jug to their side, or stretching out for the kettle, if that was preferred.

Roger, with the deliberate determination of not incurring the risk of being asked again, helped himself more than liberally.

Little did he enter into the nature of his host, who, while he winced to see his guest take so much of what *he* had to pay for, applauded him for having all he could get, when he could do so without its costing him anything.

'Come, Phœbe,' said Roger, his good-humour rising at the near approach of the time when they would take their leave, 'ain't you a singer? I think I remember you used to be. If so, won't you give us a song?'

'Me!' said Phœbe—'oh my, no! I never sung in my life—did I, Mrs. Coode? Why, I can't so much as join in a hymn tune at chapel.'

'The heart often sings, Phœbe, when the voice is mute,' said Mrs. Coode.

'Prettily put, Sister Coode,' said Mr. Yabsley; 'and very true.'

'Speakin' about singin',' said Aunt Tabby, 'what was that you was tellin' about Loyalty George, Phœbe, and her bein' heard singin' into Hockaday's?'

'Be quiet, Aunt Tabby, do!' and Phœbe emphasized her quick reproof with a nudge from her elbow. Aunt Tabby was about to retire into silence, but Aunty Tishy was already to the rescue.

'Phœbe, you must give over them snappy ways, that you must, or else we'll have to give up comin' a-nigh you—it won't do with Aunt Tabby, you know. I should think you'd learnt by this time how everythin' flies to her 'art. The next thing 'll be her breath 'll go, and you'll have her as black in the face as a coal. How you can behave so I can't think! And what's it all for?—askin' a question which can't offend anybody; or, if so, I've to be told how. So far as I'm aware of, Loyalty George is in no ways connected with anybody in this company.'

'Most certainly not,' said Mrs. Coode decidedly.

'Our young friend Phœbe,' said Mr. Yabsley, patting the girl softly on the back, 'had only the wish to hush a report which I fear has got rather spread abroad.'

'Spread abroad?' said Mrs. Coode; 'I should think it had! And why shouldn't it? What's done on the housetops can't be hid under a bushel.'

'That's not Mr. Yabsley's meaning at all,' said his wife, who didn't consider Mrs. Coode was speaking in a tone at all becoming to a preacher of the Word.

'What he means is that the report that's got about ain't true.'

The quick, interested way in which Roger looked up was not lost on the mother. She was about to retort and bring forward her authority, when Mr. Yabsley began:

'Stop, Mary, stop; let me explain myself. There is truth, my dear friends, in the report; yet the report is not wholly true. I have inquired into it, and find that at Mrs. Hockaday's some singing did take place, but it was to please her; and the voice of the singer being sweet attracted other listeners, who came in, one by one, until they filled the room.'

'Why don't you say the *bar*, Mr. Yabsley? Places should be called by their proper names,' said Mrs. Coode severely. 'And the listeners were fresh from the tap-room; half of 'em drunk, I dare say. If you calls that decent and respectable—well, we must agree to differ. Singin' to Mrs. Hockaday, indeed—a woman with one leg in the grave. 'Twould much better become her to be readin' of her Bible; and I wonder you, as a minister of the Gospel, don't tell her so.'

'Oh, well,' exclaimed Mrs. Yabsley, 'there's a time for everything, Mrs. Coode; and I can't see much harm, I must say, in listenin' to a simple song.'

'Whether the song was simple remains to be proved,' retorted Mrs. Coode. 'All I can say is, there's a many as don't answer to that name.'

'Come, mother,' said Roger sharply, 'you're now speaking from hearsay.'

'I'm speakin' from nothin' of the sort, Roger.' Mrs. Coode was certainly not going to be silenced by her own son. 'If you must know, your father was a singin' man.'

'Well, what of it?'

'Why, that he sung many songs as had best been left unsung.'

Roger in his turn refused to give way.

'Tsh!'—and he made a sound of contempt—'I should like to hear the names o' some of them.'

'Oh, well, I can give 'em to you,' said Mrs. Coode, with rising temper. 'There was "Sweet Kitty," that was one; and another was the "Port Admiral" —they one and the other was ondecent and profane.'

'Nonsense, mother!' Roger felt he must maintain his point, for the sake of his father's reputation. 'If there should happen to be a word in either of 'em that you mightn't care to hear, what harm could come to anybody for just singin' 'em?'

'Roger, you surprise me, talkin' at random as you are, when you knows the judgments as come suddent on people.'

'What, when they'm singin'?' laughed Roger sarcastically.

'As much when they'm singin' as when they'm cryin'. Anybody 'ud suppose you'd never heard tell of precious eyesight bein' destroyed through a flash o' lightnin', or a stroke takin' the power o' your limbs away! How can you tell at what moment your breath will be required of you? And there'd

be a awful thought—to fall into the jaws o' death with the "Port Admiral" in your mouth! Roger, I'm ashamed to listen to such talk—comin', too, from my own son!'

The gloominess of this last supposition seemed to impose momentary silence on everybody, and seeing she had produced a salutary effect, Mrs. Coode told Phœbe to bring the candle in, that she might put on her things—it was on the strike of nine, and high time to go.

CHAPTER XIV

OUTSIDE the house, Roger breathed again freely. He did not dare, however, to give vent to his joy, for Lucas Rowe had walked as far as the gate with them, at which he was still standing. 'Roger,' he called out, in his dull, monotone voice, 'don't make yerself strange, ye know.' The opportunity for business conversation had never been afforded, for which Rowe consoled himself by the assurance that 'he'd bin takin' stock of Roger,' apparently with satisfaction; for he added, after a moment's pause, 'Drop round to yard to-morrow, if you ain't got nothin' better to do. I fancies us might find a word or two to say to wan another.'

'Thankee,' said Roger; and having closed the gate which led into the churchyard they were crossing, he added, 'I wonder what the d——d old rascal wants of me?'

At another time Mrs. Coode would have had a rebuke ready for such profanity, but between curiosity and exultation it is doubtful whether she even heard the offending word.

'"Tis my believe, from somethin' Phœbe let drop, and what he's a asked you now, that he's got it in mind to take you as pardner or somethin' o' that sort, Roger.'

'Then the sooner he gets it out o' his mind the better pleased I shall be—skulkin' old vagabond! I don't want nothin' to do with he or any of his family.'

Mrs. Coode managed to allow this apparent affront to Phœbe to go unnoticed.

'"Tis a very good business, Roger, and a wonderful opportunity. I hope you won't go to act foolish in no way.'

Roger had no desire to enter into another contention, so he said, with a tremendous sigh, 'I can't say at this partickler moment how I mightn't act; a evenin' such as we've had regularly overhauls a chap. I feel as if I could make a proper night of it somewheres, and go for a jolly good spree.'

'La bless the boy,' exclaimed the mother anxiously, 'hold your tongue, do! Such talk gives me quite a shudder; it makes me think I sees your father in you.'

'And why shouldn't ye?—I'm his son, ain't I? I tell 'ee what 'tis, old lady; you mustn't hold too tight a hand over me. "A wild goose never laid a tame egg," you know.'

'Why, Roger, whatever amount o' drink have 'ee had, that you should go on as you're doin'?'

'I took all I'd got the chance to. That was the best o' the whole concern. When the spirits come near me, and I catch'd old Rowe watchin' of me — "Here's the water," he says, pushin' the jug over to me; so I ups with my thumb and bends the first joint of un over the ridge o' the glass, and goes on pourin' till the liquor touches it.'

'Then 'twas what you oughtn't to have done,' said Mrs. Coode. 'I'm the last to object to a man's taking his glass or so in a gen'ral way; but to drink off a tumbler of what you might almost call raw spirits isn't neither consistent nor fittin'. You can't be careful enough in that way, seein' how raw spirits flies to the heads o' many.'

'Oh, well, 'tis t'other side up to-night with me. If 't has flied anywheres, 'tis into my heels; I seem as if I could walk ten miles straight off the reel—and I b'lieve I'm goin' to do it, too.'

'Why, Roger, you must be mazed, surely!'

'I should be if I was to stop indoors with you. I'll see 'ee inside, mother, and light the candle, and then off I goes.'

'Goes!—goes where? Why, last night you was away till nobody knows what time!'

'Oh, was I? Who told you that?'

'Nobody—nobody need to. I've got my hearin', and I heard you come in.'

'Bad plan that, mother, to go to sleep with yer ears open.'

'If you're meanin' by that, *me*, I didn't go to sleep at all; and as for ears open, in these days mothers needs more than the one pair o' they—and o' eyes, too, when they sees their children carryin' on some mystery which they ain't meant to fathom.'

Roger made no answer: he took his pipe, examined into the condition of his tobacco, and turned to go; but his heart smote him.

'Come, come, mother,' he said, 'now don't you be pullin' one way and me another—that'll never do; only you must allow me a little latitude, you know, and try to remember that I've growed into a man.'

'And 'tis therefore I expects you to show the sense of one.'

Mrs. Coode felt she was acting foolishly in thus trying to strain her authority; but her temper was roused, and she could not control her indignation.

'Oh, well, if that's the case, 'tis best shown in my biddin' you good-night for a while;' and he went from the room, and in another minute the house door closed after him.

Once outside, Roger paused; he knew his motive, but how to attain it was not so clear to him.

The Cliff!—known as the Shag Cliff—their yesternight's place of meeting—might not Loyalty have gone again there? Past experience told him how in previous misunderstandings she had ever been the first to seek reconciliation. Already he was on his

way along the Lees, paying no heed to the still beauty which, wherever the hedge lay low, disclosed itself to him.

The night—which had followed a sunset of golden glory—was heralded by dark banks of purple clouds, these in their turn broken and chased away by rifts of light, which flung themselves in darts down on the silent river gliding noiselessly towards the open sea. The grass of the sloping fields was hidden in a misty vapour which, growing more dense above, seemed to stretch up and touch the fleecy sky.

But Roger saw none of this; his eyes, his ears, his every sense were swallowed up in one desire—to be with Loyalty. What to say, how to act, the reason why he sought her, it mattered nothing to him now; the one object was to see her, to be with her, to hear her speak.

The heaviness induced by the large measure of spirits he had taken, which oppressed him in the dull atmosphere of the Rowes' parlour, had given way to an elasticity hitherto unknown; he seemed to tread the air, winged footsteps sped him along the path.

'Hallo!' he exclaimed, shouting out the word; for having taken the same route, and reached the spot where on the previous night Loyalty had embarked, there lay the boat, and in it sat the ferryman, Dunchy. Roger had had no wish to attract attention, but coming through the still air the 'Hallo!' had caught Dunchy's dulled ears, and he vigorously returned the salutation, adding—

'Who es it, eh? Do 'ee want to go over?'

'Not I,' said Roger, with surprising good-humour, considering that an instant before he had felt vexed at speaking.

Dunchy scrambled over the boat, so as to command an angle which would give him a better sight of the speaker, whose identity he suspected without feeling positively sure of it.

'Why, 'tis Roger Coode!' he shouted after him. 'How be 'ee? You'm Roger, for certain; b'aint 'ee?'

'When you've said yes, o' what use is there o' me sayin' no?' called back Roger laughingly.

Emboldened by the tone, which reached him pleasantly, Dunchy ventured to say, 'Why, what for ever's takin' 'ee this time o' night up 'longs there? You'll meet wi' no company but yer awn, that I'll vouch for.'

'Oh, shan't I?' Roger took a step or two more forward, and then stopped, turning to face towards the old man as he said, 'Why, how do you know? You've brought somebody—or else you'm waitin' for 'em—ain't ye?'

'Iss; but not any wan that you knows. 'Tis best you goes t'other side; shall I put 'ee over?'

At another time Roger would have felt furious that his motive in going to the Cliff should be guessed at; but somehow this evening he didn't care. He laughed as if amused at Dunchy's perspicuity, and muttering something about the cunning old vagabond, he ran with breakneck recklessness down the face of the

Cliff from where he was standing, scrambled over the mud-covered rocks, and took his seat in the boat.

'Now then,' he said, as Dunchy pushed off, 'where is it you'm goin' to take me to?'

'Wherever 'tis you'm wantin' to go.'

'I'm blamed if I know where that is, exactly;' and Roger gave a little sheepish laugh.

'Wa'al, then, you doan't follo' suit wi' most o' they that 'bout this time I ferries over. All mayn't sail under the same colours, but 'tis hilter-skilter for the wan port.' He paused, as if expecting some remark would be made; but finding his listener silent, he continued, with a deep-drawn sigh, 'I s'pose 'tis ordained right that us should all have our day, and mine's over; if it wasn't, be jabers, I'd have a try too! You don't meet wi' two maids like she in wan day—I might say in wan lifetime; do 'ee, now?'

'How am I to know,' said Roger, 'who 'tis you'm meanin'?'

'Why, th' ole Lucas's daughter, Phœbe Rowe, to be sure!' and Dunchy winked his eye with the most significant meaning. 'There's a face for 'ee when you'm took with a likin' for suetty puddin'!'

Roger burst out laughing.

'Iss, iss, I know,' continued Dunchy; 'there wudn't be much lookin' arter she, if 'twasn't for the money-bags they's all expectin'. Lord, her's got a heart, her has, as 'ud rattle in a nutshell!'

'She don't seem to meet your fancy, no ways,' said Roger.

'No, nor nobody else's, when you goes to place her aside o' Loyalty. 'Tain't, mind, the beauty I speaks of now; cos, come to my years, you knows that beauty's only skin deep after all.'

'What more, then, has *she* got than that?' Roger was apparently bent on not mentioning Loyalty's name.

'What more?' exclaimed Dunchy enthusiastically. 'Why, her's got a heart as true as steel, a love as constant as the needle to the pole!—and you may trust to what I say, Roger Coode, for I'd allays a eye for summin' up a female.' Dunchy had raised his sculls out from the water, and, resting them together, he was letting the boat drift with the stream, his body bent forward so as to impress on Roger the experience he credited himself with having.

''Tain't no bad gift, that, for a sailor man,' he added, 'being able to circumwent the women. Many's a time one of 'em fancied her'd took'd the measure o' my foot, till it come to tryin' the boot on, and then they found 'twouldn't fit no ways. All that you wants to do with Loyalty,' he continued, after a minute's reflection, 'is take her straight off from her old grandfer, and put the father out o' yer head; and then, up 'mong they as is looked up to and thinks well o' theyselves, if she don't prove to you a jewel o' gold in a swine's snout, as the Bible readin' has it—well, don't you trust me never no more!' And with the apparent certainty that there could be no argument to this conclusive reasoning, Dunchy

resumed his sculls, and gave some vigorous pulls which soon brought them to the shore.

'Well,' said Roger, as the old fellow grasped his hand in appreciation of the generosity bestowed on him, 'I wonder what next I'd better be after!'

'Why, step out a bit, up the Clift and over the turmet-field to cut off a corner, and you might chance to get up with the young Ned Hockaday.'

'What! 's he gone down there?'

Dunchy affected to chuckle with laughter. 'Where else does he ever go to?—the chap's mazed after her! If her was to tell un to lie down in the road for her to walk over un, he'd only say, "Thank 'ee."'

'How long's that bin going on?'

'For a brave bit now. He can't get *her* ear, but he's got th' ole man's favour; and no wonder—for the Hockadays is purty warm, and Loyalty can twist the whole of 'em round her finger. The mother's ready to go down on her bended knees if she could only get her to take up with Ned.'

Roger was comparing Dunchy's statement with what he had already heard from Miss Anne, and the effect was as a fierce wind to a flame. When he had stepped out of the boat he was surprised to find how he had cooled down—half his ardour seemed gone, he felt lazy, well-dispositioned, and inclined to return home; but now, in addition to the longing desire he had started with, the demon jealousy had stepped in, and with that overwhelming incon-

sistency of love, Roger was possessed by the fear that if he did not seek her now Loyalty might be lost to him for ever.

At all times a rare visitor at The Cot, Roger was sure of a welcome. Jake George, although he had never alluded to the subject, honoured the lad who had protected his granddaughter. If a latent suspicion had ever been roused that something warmer than gratitude and chivalry drew the two together, he had never breathed a syllable of such a suspicion. The rough, doubtful hospitality shown to those who habitually frequented The Cot was freely offered to Roger, but up to the present time he had never taken advantage of the invitations—invitations not pressed on him—to look in of an evening, when a few of those about met together It was the association with those 'few' which had made Roger hold aloof. They were men against whom no positive proof had ever been brought, and yet every one more than suspected them, and half the village shunned them.

The teaching of the Wesleys had produced a wonderful effect in Devonshire as well as in Cornwall. The peculiarly emotional disposition of that portion of the people who dwell near the sea had made them tremble at the vividly-portrayed hell down into which the great reformer had declared they were hastening. With equal fervour their imaginations caught at the joys of heaven. So that the joys and pains which others received as metaphor were to

them a realistic vision, their noses sniffed the brimstone which should eternally consume the sinner, and their ears caught the melody which the harps of the saints in glory were ever to play in the presence of the Lord.

Steeped in ignorance, their spiritual wants utterly neglected by a race of easy-living divines—the fox-hunting, port-wine-drinking country vicars of that day—Wesley spoke of the religious revival which swept over these counties as 'a brave shaking of dry bones.' Consciences were stricken and awakened—motives, actions inquired into—each of the new band of brethren kept one eye to watch himself with, but used his two eyes to scan his neighbour.

With the zeal of enthusiasts, all who were not with them they condemned unsparingly; they drew a sharp division between those in grace and those who refused it, and lost much of the merit of their self-denial and discipline by the proud consciousness they felt in being so immeasurably better than those they lived among.

The lawlessness which had spread over the whole of England—shown in the gambling, loose living, reckless extravagance of towns, and the poaching, smuggling, and orgies of low revelry in the country—had up to the time of this revival been indulged in with little offence or reproach. The demoralizing influence of years of warfare, the reckless expenditure of prize-money bestowed on those who had

been earning glory for their country, all led to a low state of morality. In seaports and for miles around this influence was most apparent, and Ferrers and Fairstoke, in common with other villages along the coast, suffered from its proximity to Plymouth, and from being known as havens for free traders.

At illicit practices of every kind Wesley aimed the thunderbolts of his denunciation, and the Puritan spirit quickened again into life ran with violence into the opposite extreme. From having only obeyed the laws which their wills dictated, his followers now enforced the commandments with Mosaical strictness. To keep the Sabbath, to have no companionship with backsliders, to avoid all communication with evil-livers, caused a sifting among the hitherto one-intentioned community which led to years of bitterness and animosity. Time had toned down this active state of enmity, and there had been instances of falling away on both sides, but many of the original members were still alive to set their faces against bridging over the gulf which had then opened out to divide them. Foremost among these stood Mrs. Coode. She could recall the days when the earnest band had, regardless of weather or season, walked Sunday after Sunday to Briton-side, and there, under a still standing tree, held their service and listened to the discourse of some travelling preacher. Circumstances have changed since those days; there was no need to take this Sabbath walk now—Ferrers possessed a

chapel of its own, where its members could worship at their ease; but the original pillars of the Society shook their heads at the present law of liberty. What they called lukewarmness was now called charity; indifference was misnamed toleration.

A great cause of dissension had recently occurred to set these conflicting opinions into active motion. The wife of Hockaday, who kept the Cat and Fiddle, at Fairstoke, had been in the village for years an unfortunately prominent character.

A kind, affectionately-dispositioned creature, with all those weaknesses of mind and body which make an over-indulgence in stimulants come very readily, she had sunk into an almost confirmed drunkard, drawn on to her ruin by a husband who preferred to see her merry and drunk than sad and sober. With no hand to give her help, the poor soul had never found strength to raise herself out of the mire. The fumes of the liquor passed away, she loathed herself; overcome by repentance and sorrow, to what could she turn? There was nothing for her but to drink again and drown her misery—the Pharisees passed and repassed on the opposite side, and for years never a Samaritan came her way.

Drinking, cock-fighting, card-playing, all found their home at the Cat and Fiddle. Far and near strangers around came to enjoy joviality and good liquor dispensed by Hockaday; but Mrs. Coode and many of her neighbours would have parched with thirst rather than touch a drop of anything coming

out of that ill-famed hostelry, and they endured the martyrdom of sour, washy beer and ill-concocted spirits rather than buy what, as judges, they knew to be good, but by past experience equally well knew had never paid duty.

The Hockadays had a son, the only child left out of a large family. On him the very life of the mother was centred, and it was he who had set his heart on Loyalty.

For years Loyalty had been used to come and go at the Cat and Fiddle. Although her grandfather had never put foot in the house, some mysterious transactions connected him and Hockaday; and Loyalty was frequently their messenger. The only loving words and caresses as a child she had ever known came from Mrs. Hockaday. So long as the woman had a gleam of sense left, she would never let Loyalty see her condition; and often, when recovered and more herself, the poor wretch, in her roundabout, stumbling way, with tears streaming from her eyes, and sobs rending her bosom, would try and warn the growing girl against that terrible temptation to which, hanging her head, she gave no name. Later on, after Roger's rescue had introduced him to her, Mr. Yabsley scented for Loyalty the same danger; and speaking of it, and in his kindly way pointing out to her how open she was to the assaults of this insidious enemy, the young girl had been proud to say, 'I never puts to my lips liquor of no kind. Not that I've a mind to—I don't

like it; but if I did I wouldn't, cos I promised not to.'

'Promised! Did you?' Mr. Yabsley smiled. 'That,' he was saying to himself, 'is some of our excellent Sister Coode's teaching.'

'Well, 'twasn't exactly a promise; her didn't ask me to—but when she was tellin' up and that, and the tears a-streamin' down her face, I knowed it would please her; and so it did. She tried herself to be better for ever so long'—and Loyalty's eyes fixed themselves on Mr. Yabsley, their expression given point to by a little hopeless shake of the head.

'Who, my child?' he said, with a puzzled air; 'who is it you mean?'

'Mrs. Hockaday—Ned Hockaday's mother—she up to the Cat and Fiddle.'

Loyalty was perfectly aware of the stretched-out distance between Mr. Yabsley and these people; and when he did not answer, fearing he was too greatly shocked by mention of their names, the poor girl repented of having spoken of them.

'Mrs. Hockaday!' at length said Mr. Yabsley—'Mrs. Hockaday!' he repeated, more slowly.

'She ain't so bad as you thinks for,' said Loyalty, constrained to stand up for her friend.

'It isn't her I'm thinking badly of, Loyalty. It's of some one else—some one else, my child.'

Loyalty's face grew red. 'Yes?' she said—'me, it is, you means?'

Mr. Yabsley smiled. 'Not this *me*,' and he patted

her arm gently. 'This is the *me!*' and he struck himself on the breast, continuing to do so as, with lowered head, he muttered, '"Two men went into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee——"' and then he remained silent, and something in his face and manner awed Loyalty into the belief that the minister was saying some prayers. She sat scarcely venturing to breathe, until at the end of a few minutes Mr. Yabsley spoke again; but it was of something else, not of Mrs. Hockaday.

CHAPTER XV

A WEEK had not passed from the date of this conversation with Loyalty before the whole of Ferrers and Fairstoke knew that Mr. Yabsley had been to see Mrs. Hockaday.

The humble-minded minister looked on it as a matter of special thanksgiving that his task was rendered more easy on account of the poor woman being seized with an attack of illness, the effect of a disease not until then developed, which was ultimately to send her to her grave.

The influence established by that visit was never after set aside. Gradually and with faltering steps, the hill, whose top shone with the beacon light of hope, was climbed, but, with the inconsistency which often gives bias to professing religious minds, because Mr. Yabsley could not by a miracle work his cure,

nor could Mrs. Hockaday forego at once a habit confirmed by the indulgence of years, *she* was denounced as a hypocrite, and *he* censured for tampering with a sinner. Time after time he strove to smooth down these harsh condemnations by recounting the sufferings of the poor creature, but it had always happened, that just when he had succeeded in softening indignation, some wild outbreak on her part would scatter all pity like a tornado, and after this as well appeal to images of stone as hope to make his congregation believe anything good of her again.

Stories about which there had been silence for years now found tongues to rake up and repeat their bad doings. To add fuel to the fire, Miss Anne, influenced by the history Mr. Yabsley had given her, followed his example, and went to see Mrs. Hockaday. The rector, too, who, if he ignored their spiritual wants, never forgot that his parishioners had bodily necessities, left a present of game for the sick woman; so that the whole gamut of favour was accorded to this evil-liver, and, like the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, those who looked on were scandalized at the countenance shown to her, and asked in reproach if they, the righteous, had been sick what more could have been done for them?

When Roger Coode had last left home, the stagnant pool of this discontent had just begun to stir; he had now returned to find it lashed into a storm of indignation, anger, and backbiting. Loyalty's increased presence at the house, caused by the demands made

on her affection for the sick woman, had afforded innumerable opportunities for floating the scandals Mrs. Coode was on the watch to garner up against her.

With no fixed code of propriety by which to guide her actions, without question Loyalty did very frequently overstep the barrier with which decorum should have hedged in one who aspired to Roger's love. To dance, to sing, to call forth that triumph of praise which makes success so intoxicating, was no want of modesty in a girl brought up as Loyalty had been; and that the audience were mostly men was nothing strange, seeing that at The Cot, saving herself, there never was seen a woman; so that when Mrs. Coode attacked her about this unmaidenly conduct, to which she gave very hard names, conscious of the innocence of her heart, and with a sore knowledge of the daily battle she fought against temptations unknown to more carefully-guarded girls, Loyalty had snatched the bridle from her tongue, and given loose to such a volley of words that the widow shrank back aghast, resolved never to take notice of her again.

Poor Loyalty! many a heavy sigh did she heave, many a bitter tear did she drop in penitence over that burst of passion; and, full of compunction for the bad words she had used to Roger's mother, if it had been possible, she would have tried to carry out her wishes to the letter by giving up ever again going to the Cat and Fiddle. But, as the girl well knew,

Mrs. Hockaday's life hung now by a thread which any day excess, anxiety, emotion might snap asunder. Her husband, who cared for her more than anything in the world, could not endure to see her suffer. While he was in the house he was never able to put away the coming trouble. Gradually he took to going out. The evenings, up to this spent at home, he now spent at The Cot. A few of his more intimate associates began to follow his example; and soon, by an arrangement made with Jake George, there was an understanding that until 'the Missis' got well a certain chosen few were to assemble at The Cot instead of at the Cat and Fiddle.

It was into the midst of this company that Roger Coode was now hastening, all unaware of the party he would find himself among. That strange buoyancy which he had felt earlier in the evening seemed again to impel Roger along, the movement relieving the hot jealousy which had burst out so suddenly.

With breathless haste he had scrambled up the face of the Cliff, following the track indicated by the wily Dunchy. The top reached, he gave a full-drawn sigh of relief, as if glad to be in face of that great expanse again. The sea! the sea! around everywhere—nothing to impede its vastness. Over its glittering surface the moonlight fell, flecking the rippled water with silvery beams. Beyond, point after point, the great headlands stretched out, Roger recognising in each the familiar face of a friend. In his present state of excitement everything seemed

to speak to him, to touch him, to stir within him some fresh emotion; and in this dangerous state of susceptibility he sought the presence of Loyalty.

A helter-skelter descent over the breakneck rocks, with a final drop down on to the pebbled surface of the narrow bay, brought him some twenty yards from The Cot. A flight of hewn-out and natural steps led to the ledge, a part of which this strange habitation seemed to be. Roger was already at the door, to which he applied a few vigorous knocks, and then attempted in vain to open.

'Who's there?' cried a voice within, which Roger heard because of the sudden hush which had ensued on previous loud talking.

'Come out, and then you'll see,' was the answer given. The tone seemed to satisfy the inquirer, who drew the bolt and flashed in Roger's face a lantern.

'Hullo! What you, Roger!'—it was old George who was speaking—'I'm glad to see ye, lad; and there's more than me here will give you a welcome.'

Had Roger been in a state to discriminate, he would have surely noticed a certain embarrassed cordiality in the old fellow's greeting; but as it was, everything that presented itself seemed pleasant and natural; and rubbing his eyes to clear them from the glare of the light, he was pulled inside and given a shove to, while Jake called out somewhat hurriedly:

'Roger Coode, 'tis. I fancy he's know'd by all

he'll find hisself among; and all 'ull give him welcome, as I do.'

There was a murmured answer, but what was said Roger did not know. His ears had caught the one word 'Roger!' and his eyes were seeking her who had spoken his name.

Down the centre of the room—which was long and narrow, reminding one of between decks on board a ship—the table, on tressels, ran: at it some half-dozen men were seated, all smoking, and with glasses before them.

The cloud which filled the place made its occupants obscure, and an age seemed to pass before Roger saw that Loyalty was standing almost opposite to him.

She had started from her seat as he entered the room, all the blood in her body rushed up to her face as her grandfather announced his name.

'Roger!' she had gasped out, and then had stood transfixed, the colour gradually ebbing back until her whole face looked white and drawn. With the quick eye of one who loves, Ned Hockaday, standing near, stretched out his arm; but before it could more than offer its support, Roger had sprung to her side—how he had got there he could not tell—but there he stood, and Loyalty, who had staggered back, was leaning against him.

Naturally this incident caused some disturbance among the assembled guests; and a scraping of seats as they moved to see what had happened, together with a few exclamations, was heard.

'Tsh!' sneered old George, 'we've grown nervical all at once. Come! hold up, there. I s'pose 'twas yer ghost she took ye for, Roger, comin' in so sudden upon her.'

While seeming to give her support, Roger had pressed Loyalty to him, and whispered something in her ear. Already the rich colour was mantling her cheeks again.

'I dunno what I thought,' she began, half-laughing, half-crying; 'for the minute everythin' seemed to swim round and give under me; but I'm all right now again, and ready to say how glad I is to see him.'

Loyalty had grasped that Roger wished this to be thought their first meeting.

'Where will you sit to, Roger?' she asked.

'There's room here,' said several voices.

'Wherever you chooses to set me—'tis all one to me,' laughed Roger cheerily, 'so long as you gives me my pipe, and puts a glass before me.'

This convivial sentiment met with a hearty response from the whole party, and Hockaday senior, who had up to now kept silent, called out, 'Here, Coode, take this place by me. Now, what's it you'll take, eh? Say the word—brandy—rum—gin?'

A curious feeling had suddenly come over Roger, a gnawing at his heart, a remembrance of where he was. A rapid glance round the table seemed to bring before him in a flash the evil reputation of everyone there, and the while this thorn of con-

science pricked him he heard his own voice trolling out—

'Rum and gin blow out the skin,
And brandy I can't afford.'

'All right, my hearty!' and Hockaday reached over for a bottle. 'Wet your whistle first with that, and we'll have a song later. There's no such word as "afford" when good liquor's meant 'mongst them you sees here;' and he winked at his opposite neighbour. 'When you've drunk The Cot dry, which I don't fear will be this time to-morrow mornin', them as wants more can drop in at the Cat and Fiddle. That's fair, ain't it?'

That name, Cat and Fiddle, hitherto so odious in its sound, seemed to strike Roger like a blow; he seized his glass and tossed off half of its liberal contents, setting it down to meet Hockaday's eyes fixed on him.

'Well,' said that worthy, 'no fault to find with that stuff, is there?'

'None;' and Roger took up his glass again. 'Only 't 'ud be a pity to spoil this drop by mixin' it with water;' and drinking what remained, he looked up and saw that Loyalty was watching him.

What had come to Roger? She had never seen him like this before. The anxiety she felt was expressed in her tell-tale face; it awoke within her a vague fear which almost quenched the joy of their reconciliation. Her look was not lost on him.

'Well,' he said, trying by blurting out the first

thing that came into his head to overcome the embarrassment he was feeling, 'what's this I've been hearin' about your fine singin', Loyalty? I haven't had the chance of a song for ever so long. Come, now, strike up, let's have one.'

In doubt as to his real meaning, Loyalty shook her head. 'You wouldn't care to listen; you don't really mean it. No, no, Roger, no.'

'No, no!—but I say yes; and you must, too. What you do for others, you'll have to do for me.'

'Hear, hear!' cried a hatchet-faced man close by —'a good song's the makin' o' good company. I only knows wan; but in my turn I's allays ready to give 'ee he.'

'Then sing un now,' said Loyalty. '*Do!* Somebody must begin, Mr. Wakeham; why not you? 'Tis "The Fatal *Ramilies*," Roger,—every one likes that song, cos it all happened off Bolt Tail!'

'Hark to her,' said the man in question, not displeased to have his long and mournful ditty called for. 'Oh, she's a deep un, she is. 'Twill be a smart chap as 'ull get the rounds o' she; and there's some present here who's tried it on, too, without makin' much headway, I fancy;' and he leaned forward to look meaningly at young Hockaday, who, pushed back from the table, sat gnawing at his nails abstractedly.

'What's that you say, Mr. Wakeham?' Ned Hockaday was not in a humour to let anything pass easily. 'Was you speakin' to me—eh?'

Wakeham, wishing to mark the joke he was about to play, gave a nudge of his elbow to Roger. 'Iss, Ned, 'tis a song we'm wantin' to hear from 'ee. Loyalty is a axin' for it. Us knows you can never deny nothin' to *she*.'

'Loyalty wasn't axin' nothin' o' the kind,' replied Ned grumpily. 'She knows better than to—she knows I can't sing.'

'No, she don't!' said Loyalty, wishing to restore good humour. 'You can sing, Ned. You knows you can!'

'Not in company such as this, though'—and Ned tried to send a meaning glance at Roger. 'When I sings, 'tis to please myself.'

'I'm glad you can amuse yerself so easily;' and Loyalty began to laugh, joined by those around her, and finally by Ned himself, who, unable to resist the hope of pleasing her, exclaimed, 'Oh, all right! I don't mind, if you'm wantin' me to—only, after it, you sings for me—d'ye hear?'

Loyalty was about to give back some saucy reply, but Roger interrupted her.

'When Loyalty sings,' he said, fixing his eyes on Ned defiantly, ''twill be for *me!*'—and with his finger he tapped on his breast, as if to enforce his individuality. 'And that, too, before she answers any call from—well, such as, so far as I can see, has no claim on her——'

Ned sprang to his feet excitedly.

'For all I know, I've got as much claim as you!

If I haven't, 'tis for Loyalty herself to tell me;' and he turned round as if demanding from her an answer. In a like manner Roger too bent eagerly towards her.

'I dunno what 'tis you're meanin' about claim!' and Loyalty flashed on Ned a look of anger; 'but if you wants to hear what is my pleasure'—and her eyes beamed as she turned them on Roger—'tis to do his biddin'—whatever he wants me to—sing now and all night long, if I only was sure he'd care to listen to me!'

An expressive whistle from those around announced the surprise of everybody—a puff of cold air, the noise of a violently-shut door, and it became evident that Ned had taken his dismissal in earnest and was gone.

'Come, come,' said old George roughly, 'you're makin' a deal side too free with your tongue there! Don't ye see you'm interruptin' everybody?'

Loyalty, seemingly abashed, shrank back, while the elder Hockaday, too thorough a landlord to take part in the quarrels of anybody, called out:

'Here, Wakeham, I thought you was goin' to give us yer song? Come, mate, don't be all night afore you makes a beginnin'.'

Was it the reaction of that momentary excitement or the reviving puff of cool air which brought Roger back again to reason? What was he doing? Why was he here? He almost groaned to think of the mad folly into which his ungovernable passion had

brought him. He, Roger Coode, sitting a boon companion with those he saw around—impossible! He must be dreaming. Oh!—and in the very moment of this agonizing self-condemnation the compunction he felt vanished and was gone, and he found all his attention centred now on the song which his neighbour was singing:

'Seven hundred and twenty brave lads had she,
And ninety good guns for to keep her company,
But as we was sailin', to our great surprise,
A terrible storm then began for to rise.
Oh, the fatal *Ramilies!*'

'Oh, the fatal *Ramilies!*' was wailed out in chorus; and Roger joined in, lifting his glass, which had been refilled, as the others did, to drink in unison.

Looking round the room his eyes fell on Loyalty. He made a sign for her to come near, indicating that a seat could be found for her between him and the singer:

'The sea look'd fire as it roll'd mountains high,
Our men began to quake, and our Cap'ten he did cry—
"My lads, mind yer business, yer skill do not spare,
For so long as we've got sea-room we've nothing else to fear."
Oh, the fatal *Ramilies!*'

'Go on!' said Loyalty hastily—'never mind the chorus, give the next verse.' And she nudged Wakeham with her arm to continue singing.

Wakeham, under the supposition that she was

anxious for her turn to come, complied, and plunged at once into the relation of the final disaster:

> 'In a few minutes later, with the terriblest shock—
> Oh, the fatal *Ramilies!*—she dashed agen a rock;
> Both Christians and Jews too most sad must now lament,
> For few were the cries when with all hands down she went.
> Oh, the fatal *Ramilies!*'

'Oh, the fatal *Ramilies!*' went echoing round, while bottles were passed and glasses replenished.

'You must take no more, Roger—not just yet,' whispered Loyalty coaxingly, laying a detaining hand on the one which Roger had just stretched out.

'Why, what do ye say that for? Is it 'cos you think I've had too much already? Lord love ye!'—and he laughed noisily—'you ought to have seed me this evenin' up to the old Lucas Rowe's house. If I didn't pour in a skinful then, 'tis a pity; I never before drunk so much in my life. But what of it? Here I sits as sober as a judge. You doubt me?'

'Oh no, I don't; only I,'—and her voice spoke caressingly—'wondered whether you wouldn't come for a bit outside? 'Tis lovely there—so quiet, and calm, and cool.'

'Well, but I wants to hear ye sing first; and dance, too. I'm first-rate at stepping' it out myself, when I'm in the mind to.' And pushing back the seat with a sudden violence which almost sent the other sitters sprawling on the floor, he commenced a double-shuffle with his feet.

'Here, avast there, messmate!' said Wakeham

somewhat surlily. 'If you wants to dance Pedro-pee in that fashion, it's time us got the decks clear for 'ee.'

'Decks clear! What 'ull ye bet me that I don't give ye a hornpipe on that table without shiverin' a rummer or overturnin' a bottle?'

And not waiting for an answer, with the dexterity of a cat he sprang up on to the only vacant space, and the next minute was posturing, balancing, and going through those wonderfully varied steps which, the delight of all seafaring men, drew forth a burst of applause from those looking on.

His face flushed, animated, and lit up by that air of devil-me-care defiance, Roger seemed another man; and, as though he was another man, Loyalty stood looking at him. A chill had fallen on her spirits, a hand clutched at her heart. In her ears rang the 'Bravo!' 'Well done!' of those assembled, accompanied by the tattoo of their feet and the clatter of their glasses, as, in token of applause, they beat their clenched fists with enthusiasm on the table.

What should she do? 'Roger!' she almost called aloud. Could no means be devised to get him away, to induce him to go home? Familiar with these revelries of drunkenness and disorder, for the first time Loyalty seemed to comprehend their coarseness and degradation. With hands clenched and eyes upturned—a model for the Muse of Tragedy—she stood regarding her lover with despair. A dexterous twist, followed by a spin round which might have

called forth envy in the breast of a ballet-dancer, and Roger sprang from off the table and was again by Loyalty's side, while those nearest pressed around eager in their offers that he should refresh himself from out of each of their newly-filled glasses.

'Roger,' pleaded Loyalty, interposing her arm between him and them, 'listen to me. Hearken. Don't 'ee take no more to drink. You ain't accustomed to so much liquor.'

Roger tapped her on the cheek, as if disposed to obey.

'Blame the maid!' exclaimed Hockaday angrily, 'there's time enough when you'm his wife to set about that palaver.'

'I b'lieve 'ee,' chimed in another near. 'If 'twas with me any female came forward to interfere, by the holy poker her'd have to whistle afore she catch'd me buyin' a weddin' ring to fit her finger!'

Loyalty turned on them with the fury of a tigress, flinging reproaches at one and the other; and then, seeing by the expression in Roger's laughing face that her last chance was slipping from her, she cried out, 'Roger! Roger! if you won't pay no heed to me, think—think of your mother.'

Like one who running at top speed sees he has come to where a yawning precipice opens out at his feet, Roger tottered and staggered back—in one flash where he was, whom among, the state he had fallen into, all passed before him.

'My mother?' he gasped, and then there burst

from him a peal of wild laughter which shook the very rafters of the room. 'My mother?' he repeated —'My mother's an old Methody!'

And snatching at the glass nearest to him, he drained its contents, and with it drowned the last straw which love had held out to reason.

CHAPTER XVI

ELEVEN, twelve, one, two, three.

Mrs. Coode had heard every hour strike, measuring its length by each tick of the clock. Would the night never end? Would Roger never come?

Where could he be? What could have happened to him? Angry suspicion had long since given place to sickening alarm; a thousand fears took possession of her. Foul deeds of violence, of murder, stories of press-gangs, ran through her mind, making her heart sink and her knees give way. Not for two minutes could she remain still. From window to door, from door to window, to and fro, to and fro she was constantly moving. Out into the darkness she would peer in the hope of being able to see something. Vain! vain! The mantle of night hung heavy and black as though a wall shut out all from her. Then she would strain her ears trying to catch some sound, until the clock's tick and the thud, thud of her beating heart deafened her.

Early in the night, when indignation and anger had been uppermost, Mrs. Coode had undressed and

gone to bed; but, as the hours wore on, to lie still became impossible. She had got up and re-dressed; had gone downstairs; wandered about; opened the front door, giving way to a sudden inclination to run out and seek him, and then, overcome by the emotion attending this excitement, she had tottered back to sink into the nearest chair, feeling that her trembling limbs would not support her.

Half-past three! The clock had just struck the half-hour; soon it would be four! At five, daylight would begin. That thought brought a momentary ray of comfort. When it was light she could go out —out! Out where?

A groan of helplessness was her answer. Mechanically she drew a chair over to the empty grate, in front of which she sat down; and, with her head bowed, and her hands slowly rubbing her knees, she continued rocking herself to and fro.

Worn out in mind and body, the monotony of the movement soothed her; there was a snatch of forgetfulness, out of which she started to think the minutes had been hours.

What was that? Footsteps, voices! Quick as thought she had put down the candle where its light should not be seen. Already through her ears had fallen a blow which had smitten her; the voice was Roger's voice. He was singing—

> 'Very good song, and very well sung,
> Jolly companions every one;
> Put your hats on to keep your heads warm,
> A little more liquor will do us no harm.'

For days that tune and those words were to haunt her at moments when she most desired to forget them, making her thoughts, her prayers, all she said, keep time to their rhythm. Through the crevice made by the carefully drawn-back blind, Mrs. Coode could discern the outline of two figures. There was a pause, an unintelligible jargon of sound, some words of caution in a voice low, but distinct and clear, and a rambling, thickly-spoken, effusive farewell from Roger. At length the house door was clumsily opened and noisily shut again, there was a stumbling up the stairs, all was still, then the floor shook, and the window and furniture rattled. The occupant of the adjoining room had either flung himself heavily on the bed or had fallen down.

Startled by the noise, Mrs. Coode's first impulse was to see what had happened. She made a step forward, and then stopped. The bridge which separated her from the past of twenty years she had just crossed again, and *he* in there—come back—was her spendthrift, company-loving, dissolute husband, not her carefully brought-up, well-disciplined, faultless son.

Her head was drawn up, her figure seemed to grow more erect; she took the candle, and with firm step walked to the next room. There, stretched on the bed, dressed as he had come in, lay Roger. Already he had fallen into a heavy sleep. Holding the candle so that its light should fall full upon his face, the mother stood—her eyes fixed on her son;

then she turned and went out, her face ashen pale, her features sharp and set, her figure shrunken and bowed down, with the trembling limbs and tottering steps of a decrepit old woman.

Uncertain as to how the door was left, she went down to see that the latch was properly fastened, and while trying it her quickened ear caught the sound of voices. Two persons — a man and a woman — were evidently talking near in lowered tones. She listened with more strained attention, then crept into the parlour, and, through the window, her eyes getting accustomed to the grayness which precedes the dawn, she saw Ned Hockaday and Loyalty standing together, conversing earnestly. The words they said she could not catch by any possibility, but she saw Loyalty stretch out both her hands, Ned seize them, and try to draw her to him. There was a momentary struggle, and then Loyalty, freeing herself, turned and ran swiftly away, and Ned, after seeming to watch her out of sight, walked on in the opposite direction.

'I must set to, and make myself a cup o' tea.'

Mrs. Coode said these words in a voiceless whisper, uttering them as if to impress upon herself the necessity for immediate care. What she last recollected was looking stealthily out of the window. Now she was standing in the little kitchen with no clear remembrance of how she came there.

'My head's all of a miz-maze,' and she pressed her orehead with her hand, 'and there's the day, that'll have to be got through, before me.'

The necessary movements—making the fire and getting the water to boil—seemed a respite from the weight which pressed so heavily on her; and then, her preparations completed, Mrs. Coode sat down, drank the tea, which refreshed her body, and remained sitting, trying to get warm, before the fire, into which she gazed with hot, dry eyes, while her heart felt heavy and hard as stone. She had lived sixty-three years, and for the first time she was tasting the bitterness of trouble. Hitherto the sorrows she had been called on to endure had rather elevated her. She had sat apart, exalted by sufferings 'sent her from above,' responding to the sympathy of those who sought to comfort her, with platitudes of 'bowing to the rod,' 'knowing the Hand that smote,' 'submissive to the will of the Lord,' supported by the consciousness that *she* should not be left 'to sorrow without hope,' and thankful with proud humility 'that He who had afflicted knew in Whom she placed her trust.'

But in the misery which had now overtaken her, where could she look for aid, to whom could she go?

Not to that God whose protection for her son, so much better than others she might name, she had hitherto all but claimed.

Through all the watches of that past night never once had her eyes looked up, or her lips breathed a prayer. The resentment, bitterness, hatred, which her roused suspicions had induced, seemed to rob her of every spark of religious consolation, and when,

later on, terror and anxiety took the place of anger, she still remained cold and dry.

What had she done? What had she done? That was the thought which mostly occupied her, for, having heretofore taken her blessings as merited rewards, she naturally inferred that she must in some way have incurred the displeasure of the Lord.

Scanning her actions to find some duty omitted, some observance left undone, she made a retrospect of the years since Roger was a child, tracing him step by step, from boy to lad, from lad to man; and never, in one instance, had he caused her anxiety or pain, except through his intimacy with Loyalty George. Yes, *she* it was who was driving him to destruction, *she* the fatal instrument to drag him down to ruin. During the years of recent absence, while the mother was daily growing more secure, they were cheating, deceiving her; she plotting, planning, building castles in the air, and they laughing to see her so blind. Her seared heart swelled that such treatment should come from her son, but the treachery of Loyalty shook her like a reed. A Nemesis in her fury, she called down imprecations on the girl's head, turning in her vengeance towards the direction of The Cot, over which the rosy dawn was slowly breaking.

The blush of coming day could just be seen, over the stretching headlands the light began to creep, the sea that had looked gray deepened into blue.

Balls of cloud undid their fleece to spread themselves and steal along the cliffs. Afar a thread of light ran like a silver zone around the horizon, and gazing at this new-born glory stood the object of Hephzibah Coode's hatred, the evil genius of her son, Loyalty George, her nature responding to, without comprehending why she was stirred by the sight of, this oft-seen mystery. Unknown to herself, the girl's impressionable temperament answered to the varied moods of her surroundings. She was pensive, sad, gay, boisterous, as Nature smiled or frowned. The fantastic rocks, the many-coloured cliffs, the clouds, the sky, the ever-changing sea, dumb to others, to her spoke in language she could understand.

With one knee resting on a hollowed rock called the Smuggler's Seat, Loyalty's cheek leaned upon the grass-covered mound which gave it shelter. Her body was weary, but her thoughts too active to allow of any inclination to sleep. The night had been full of excitement, bringing emotions into play the existence of which she had hitherto never guessed at.

Up to now her lament had often been that Roger wasn't in his ways more like the men she lived among. She had wished she could see him at the Cat and Fiddle, or The Cot, doing as others did there. How they took their pleasure, or the condition they were in, in no way affected her; it seemed only natural in men that they should get drunk, quarrel and fight, and make fools of them-

selves; but the experience of the past night had taught her another lesson, and as its different incidents came back, she pressed her fingers to her eyes, and forced them into her ears, as if the recollection of her shattered idol was agony to her. Over her stole a tenderness towards Mrs. Coode such as she had never felt before, and involuntarily she breathed a prayer that the mother had not seen her son! Poor child! how she had laboured to spare the mother that sight; and for the sake of that respectability, only valued as connected with them, what pains she had been at to screen Roger from the possible observation of his neighbours! Across the ferry, so that they might get him home by the Lees instead of through the village, she had insisted they should go. To Ned Hockaday this task had fallen: Ned, who, after wandering about wretched and desperate, returning to The Cot for a last farewell, found himself talked into undertaking the safe convoy of his rival home. At a distance Loyalty had dogged their steps, and, after watching Roger go in, she had joined Ned as seen by Mrs. Coode from her window.

Returning by the same way, she had enlisted the services of Dunchy, who confessed himself 'altogether cabobbled' by the manner which she was 'a-goin' on in.'

'Why, in the name o' goodness, however did 'ee get over and back agen?' exclaimed the old man, after he had given proper vent to his surprise at seeing her.

'I watched 'ee from back there push off, 'cos I kep' pretty well up with 'em all the ways, and then I run so fast as legs 'ud carry me down to the ford, and I crossed back by the same.'

'You'm dreenin' wet to the skin, then.'

'No, I ain't;' and she pushed him back while wringing the water from her woollen skirts.

''Tis a crownin' mercy you bain't drownded;' and Dunchy shook his head reprovingly.

'Drownded! why, 'ceptin' in one place the water wasn't more than up to so,' and she put her hand to her knee; ''sides, why should I be drownded more than scores that's crossed afore with kegs and tubs 'pon their backs? I's often been down to show 'em the way.'

'Iss, iss,' said Dunchy discontentedly, 'but they's altogether differ'nt from you; they's hasn't been brought up like females is.'

'And have I?' she said bitterly. 'Oh, Dunchy, why hadn't I got a mother like she up there, to teach me things proper, and what 'tis right for maidens to do!'

Dunchy stared at her. 'Well, I'm blamed!' he said, after an instant's pause. 'You beats cock-fightin', you do! Why, I thought for to see 'ee jumpin' out o' yer skin for joy! Roger down to Cot, and carryin' on with Hockaday and they: swearin' and singin' and cussin' and jokin', 'til I laughed like a piskie, I was that o'erjoyed thinkin' how pleased you'd be.'

'No,' she said, with a shiver as of pain. 'I'd ha' gived anythin' to get un away; I couldn't abear to see him doin' like them other men. 'Tis as if I'd dragged un down, Dunchy, that's what cuts me so. I know now what his mother means; 'tis true what she says,' and Loyalty's head drooped low—'I'm no fit to mate with such as he.'

'Th' ole Jezebel!' exclaimed Dunchy indignantly. 'Let her look to her precious son now; as drunk as a lord, or David's sow; and, as for that, he was three sheets in the wind when I first took un across here. He'd been passin' the evenin' elsewheres, and had well bowsed up his jib afore ever he reached The Cot.'

''Twas up to Lucas Rowe's he'd been; his mother tooked him there.'

Dunchy laughed softly.

'Awh! well, then, all I wishes is that his mother could ha' heered what I'd to say about Phœbe. Us talked about you, he and me, and us talked about she; and Maister Roger Coode knows what I thinks 'bout one and t'other. *He* listened. He's a stiff-necked un, but I noted un suckin' it all in, and 'twasn't blame that fell to your share, Loyalty; you knows that, don't 'ee?'

She nodded in reply.

'No, no,' he added, 'we was always chums; what one swore t'other 'ud stick to, eh?'

'And by that reason you must stick by me now, and find out whether his mother or any about knows,

and whether they who met him is makin' a talk of it; that's my fear.'

'No;' and Dunchy shook his head confidentially; 'take my word, you may trust to 'em there: 'tis allays honour among thieves, as the sayin' goes.'

And somewhat comforted, Loyalty had gone on her way, not stopping until she reached the spot from which she watched the break of dawn. Oh, if Roger but meant some of the things he had said, and it should ever be her happiness to become his wife, how she would strive to overcome all her bad ways!

'She shouldn't speak a single word, but I'd listen to it and try to do her biddin',' she sighed, thinking how Mrs. Coode might best be influenced towards her; 'and in time it might be that she'd get in a way to feel towards me like a mother;' and softened by the thought, she fixed her eyes upon the rising sun, and in her humble, untutored fashion, lifted up her heart in prayer, hardly daring to name herself, but asking blessings for the man she loved, and for his mother too — the mother who, at that same moment, was calling down Heaven's vengeance on her head.

CHAPTER XVII

MECHANICALLY Mrs. Coode set about performing her daily duties. She put her house in order, arranged her dress, repeated her prayers, and read her morning portion; then, there being nothing

more to occupy her, she sat down. The breakfast—ready in the kitchen—Roger would find waiting for him. It was past eight o'clock, but he had not come down. Other mothers might have gone to see after their son's well-being, but not Mrs. Coode: the same hard, stern intolerance she had showed towards her husband had again taken possession of her, and whether Roger was awake, asleep, sick or sorry, it mattered nothing.

In her accustomed seat at the window of the little parlour, from force of habit she opened the baize-covered Bible which always lay near, and for a time she seemed to read. Suddenly the book was shut and pushed hastily from her. The words her eyes had been looking at had lost their meaning, they were distracting her mind by keeping time to that horrible song-tune. Her needlework! Yes, that would occupy her, and she began stitching away as she had done in days gone by, when on the work of her hands had depended the bread for herself and her child. Lost as she was in the reverie of that oft-vaunted past, some one went by whose shadow she saw, but not the face.

There was a knock at the outer door, and then a tap-tap at the sitting-room, while the voice of Phœbe Rowe said, 'I thought I might venture to come in, Mrs. Coode, as I seed you was sittin' to your sewin'.'

'Oh, it's you, is it, Phœbe,' said Mrs. Coode, not taking her eyes off her work; 'why, you'm out early—have you come through the village?'—saying these

words made her heart beat so fast that her breath seemed ready to fail her.

'Only so far as it brought me to this door,' Phœbe replied, with an air of mystery. 'Father it is who's sent me down;' and she looked cautiously round, as if fearing someone might be listening. 'You know what I dropped a hint of yesterday, Mrs. Coode; well, father's reg'lar set on it since he's seen Roger. He did speak out so when the Yabsleys was gone. I never! You should ha' seed Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby. Oh my! I know 'twas a pill for they to swallow, but father didn't care, no more do I neither, if 'tis what will meet with your approval. That's all 'tis that I keeps thinkin' on;' and she paused, looking at Mrs. Coode questioningly.

'Oh, well, Phœbe'—Mrs. Coode was racked to know how best to act diplomatically—'my answer to that must be withheld until there's more said in the way of plain speakin'. 'Tis all very good to listen to a hint from you, but I've got to learn yet what's your father's offer.'

'Oh, certainly! Of course, that's only what's natural; and I dessay 'twould ha' been better if I'd ha' kept my tongue between my teeth; but, there, you know how I am when 'tis anythin' to be withheld from you, Mrs. Coode; and no wonder, seein' how you've always acted towards me like a mother.'

Mrs. Coode tried to stretch her mouth into an apology for a smile. She had no sympathy with Phœbe to-day—apart from the errand she had come

on—her meaningless chatter irritated her; and then, fearing that Roger might come down, she wanted her gone.

'Father often says that I shouldn't believe that the world was made round if Mrs. Coode gainsaid it in any way.' Then, thinking her cajolery was not making its usual mark, she turned the conversation by saying, 'I s'pose 'tis only natural he should take for granted what he's got in his mind, 'cos most thinks father's business is a capital concern, and so it is; but, as he keeps on sayin', what's the good if he can't look after it—and he can't, Mrs. Coode, and that's the truth; for he ain't so young as he used to be, and nobody sees that better than me: and though, please God take poor father, I should be very well left, still 't'ud be a thousand pities to see the business gone.'

Mrs. Coode heaved a sigh the depth of which was beyond Phœbe's shallow conception. The highest ambition she had ever formed was to see Roger master of that building-yard. Had she not pinched and scraped to hoard up money, so that in case Rowe was found ready to listen to an offer, she could put her hand on a tidy sum? And here was her wildest wish more than anticipated: instead of their begging, the old curmudgeon himself was proposing this.

'What message, then, Phœbe, is it that your father's sent to Roger?'

'Why, to go to the yard to have a talk with him

so soon as he could, or between half-past twelve and one. I s'pose he's out now?' and she turned her head in the direction of the kitchen.

'Oh, he couldn't come at present; 'twould be impossible,' said Mrs. Coode hastily.

'I was wonderin'—just come home and that—whether or no he might be up,' ventured the wily Phœbe, the expression on Mrs. Coode's face making her hastily add, 'but father said Roger was no lie-a-bed, that he'd bet a guinea. When last evenin' he began speakin' up so to Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby, you might ha' knocked me down with a feather—it seems all along father's had his eye on him, 'cos of his bein' so sober and steady and so——'

'I'm not goin' to hurry you, Phœbe,' and Mrs. Coode got up as if about to push her visitor out at the door; 'but if you'm goin' to take back your father any answer, 'tis best for you to go. Time's runnin' on while you'm standing gossipin' here, and he ought to know that Roger can't go to the yard—not this mornin'.'

'Neither can't he 'bout one?' said the amazed Phœbe, dumfoundered by this unexpected interruption.

'Well, as to that I can't quite say, but your father shall be let know. Tell un that you didn't see Roger, but that was the message from me.'

'Yes, I'll tell him,' said Phœbe, maintaining the same smiling face as she turned away. Then the whole expression changed into resentment and anger.

'Well, I never did!' she exclaimed to herself; 'the ill-tempered old thing! If it wasn't for Roger, catch me runnin' after her as I've done. Never mind, if I gets him 'twill be my turn, and we'll see who's missis then. I'm sick of it, that I am—the whole Chapel lot, and the Yabsleys in the bargain! You mustn't do nothin', speak nor act nor dress, but how and as pleases them. Talk about Loyalty George, I envies her, I declare I do! She do get some pleasure out of her life; and I gets none out o' mine, mewed up with a passel o' ole cats, and the maidens all set against me.'

For Phœbe was by no means a favourite with the girls of her own age. The price of being held up as an example she paid for in unpopularity. In her heart she loved merry-making and finery as well as any, only she had been brought up a hypocrite, and from the time she was a child had had every youthful instinct repressed in her. Except for the attentions of some local preachers and class leaders, Roger was the only young man into whose company she had been thrown. His good-looking face and free, open manner at once captivated her, and it only needed a little encouragement from Mrs. Coode for her to believe that she was in love. Rightly gauging that her fortune was not the least of her attractions, she had always kept her expectations well in sight with the mother; and, far more cunning than she was given credit for, it had been by her instigations that the idea had taken possession of her father that it would serve his turn to make Roger a sort of partner.

The advantages of the offer old Rowe had in his mind to make were by no means of an overwhelming nature, but Phœbe had dropped the seed artfully, and the ambition budding in Mrs. Coode's heart had burst into flower. Nothing could have given a greater chill to this blossom than Roger's mode of taking the suggestion of his coming fortune, coupled with his subsequent behaviour; and, had the subject been spoken of this morning before Phœbe's arrival, Mrs. Coode would have said it was no longer of interest to her. But she could not say that now; the prize she had striven for was within her grasp; added to her feeling as mother was the triumph over failure, the satisfaction which crowns success. Was all to slip from her—this answer to her prayers, this working of Providence in her behalf?—for with rising hopes her stunned religion was struggling back to life. Would it prove nothing but Dead Sea fruit, fair in promise, to turn to dust in the mouth?

Mrs. Coode rose from her chair and went to the door, prompted to go upstairs and see after her son. She paused—the chill at her heart was still there; her features grew set, her mouth drew itself into a thin line. 'No,' and she shook her head; and, to compromise matters, went into the kitchen, to find Roger was already down. With his back to the untasted breakfast, he was sitting before the fire.

The sight of his bent head, not raised, an expression on his face never seen by her there before, went through her like a knife. The boy of whom she

had been so proud unable to meet her eye, hanging his head, not daring to look her in the face!

At the bare thought that wondrous mother-love leaped into life, and she was striving to shield him from her own scrutiny, saying in the most indifferent voice she could assume—

'Why, good gracious on me, how soft you must have come down, and me never to hear! Talk about sleepin' sound, I must surely have been dreamin' as I sot in my chair, and you with no breakfast neither!'

Roger cleared his throat in the effort it cost him to speak.

'Oh, don't mind botherin' about me, mother'—his husky voice and faltering tone touched her still more—'it's late, long past your time, I know.'

'No matter late or early, people wants their vittals all the same, and I shan't say no to a cup o' tea myself when I finds one ready. 'Tis a nice mornin', that's a mercy, seein' that last night the clouds looked gatherin' up for rain.'

She, always so punctilious in demanding an answer or some comment on whatever she said, now gave the reins to her tongue to run on without seeming to notice that Roger did not utter a word. Two or three times he tried, but the power of speech seemed to fail him. Before coming down, he had doubted whether his mother had heard him return. The door was closed—as he supposed he might have closed it after him—and there was no sign that she

had been into his room; on the contrary, his hat and neckerchief lay on the floor where he had dropped them, and had she been in to see, assuredly they would have been picked up by her. Prepared, but very ill-disposed, to listen to a wordy storm, he had crept down just after Phœbe had gone, and had remained quietly seated in front of the fire as his mother had found him; but the first word Mrs. Coode spoke betrayed her. Her softened tone fell like a knell on Roger; no censure, anger, reproach could have filled him with half the compunction that he felt at seeing his mother—that champion of truth—acting the dissembler. What had she seen? how much did she know? to what agony had he put her?

It needed all Roger's strength to keep back the sighs and groans which it seemed to him would have eased the weight of his burden. And all this time Mrs. Coode continued to talk of this thing and that, surrounding her son with little quiet attentions, but never once looking at him, or scarce turning her eyes in his direction.

The breakfast disposed of and cleared away, she invented some excuse for returning to her little sitting-room. This question of seeing Lucas Rowe was again pressing on her, and a hundred times more heavily since her love for her boy had come back. How, she asked, could she have felt so hard to him, when she didn't know what mightn't have happened? The drink he had had might have been doctored, drugged; there was nothing, she believed, that that

girl and the crew she herded with wouldn't be capable of doing. Besides, compared with the 'fogram' he got at home, the liquor they'd give him—if he went down there—would be so strong, so that he might be easily overtook without knowing; and very like what he got up to old Rowe's wasn't good and pure—stuff that flew to the head—so that more than half the mischief might have been done up there.

What a special pleader is love! Mrs. Coode was armed at all points in defence of her son. The sufferings she had endured during the night were no longer remembered by her; her aversion for the sin had been washed away in her tenderness for the sinner.

This shame and penitence that his whole bearing and manner bespoke—might this not, after all, be but a lesson to him, the unseen Hand working for his good?

Rapidly the old complacency in self was being renewed, the presumption of special grace was coming back again, and with it the desire to seize this worldly good, to make the most of the opportunity which Lucas Rowe—an instrument of Providence—was being led to hold out to them.

'Roger,' called out the mother, deeming it best to make a plunge at once into deep water, 'Phœbe Rowe's been here this mornin'.'

Roger made no answer, and Mrs. Coode, advancing towards the kitchen, but stopping just short of where she need look at him, went on to add, 'She brought

a message to you from her father'—still no notice. 'It seems he's wantin' to speak a few words to you. I was wonderin' '—this part came more hesitatingly —'whether you felt equal to goin' up there—'tis to yard he means, somewheres between twelve and one —do 'ee think you could go?'

'No, I don't,' was said decidedly.

Mrs. Coode drew in her under-lip and knitted her eyebrows.

'I don't expect it's anythin' much he's a-got to say, only havin' asked 'ee last night, and now agin sent, 'tis awkward like for 'ee not to take no notice. He ain't a man as often gives way to a fancy, and when he do, he don't like to be baulked; I could see that by Phœbe's manner.'

''Tis no good, mother; there's nothin' that Rowe could be goin' to say to me that I should listen to;' the pause seemed to be filled up by a smothered sigh before he added, 'I ain't in the mood, neither, to listen to nothin' to-day, let alone the glib gabbet o' such as Rowe.'

Yes, that was it, to-day he was disposed for nothing; but to-morrow he would have returned to his senses again, and, unless something was done, the chance might be lost, never to come back. What if she went herself?

The channel into which her thoughts had run was best seen by the precedents she was recalling. There was certainly Bible authority for the course she proposed following: Rebecca, Rachel, Jael, all had acted

with cunning, and she wasn't meaning to go that far; all she wanted was to get time; how further it was to be managed she must leave until she got there.

Her decision taken, she went for her cloak and bonnet, and put them on, not going in to see her son, lest he should take notice that she was dressed with more than her ordinary everyday carefulness.

'I shan't be long gone, Roger,' she paused to say at the front door; 'an hour or best part of it I may be, 'cos there's some errants I've got to get over th' other side.'

'Th' other side!' repeated Roger, with more energy than he had yet displayed. 'Why, mother, what for are you goin' over there? I'm sure I'd let what was wanted bide for to-day.'

But Mrs. Coode would not seem to hear; she went out and closed the door. 'Now, whatever should he say that for?' she thought as she walked on. Suddenly her heart failed her; stopping as if to look at the state of the river, she leaned against the low, slate-topped wall. ''Tis the talk of them wretches he's fearin''—the thought had just flashed upon her—'how could he mix hisself up with 'em? Oh, Roger, my son, my son!'

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. COODE'S way lay along the bank of the river to what, in village parlance, was called Bridge End. At this point the union of the two parishes took

place, and, did you not want to cross the water, it was easy to walk round. Like many other places, the picturesque beauties of Ferrers and Fairstoke were seen at the cost of great inconvenience, much of which might have been lessened had the dwellers chosen to interest themselves in the remedy. But that time-honoured rule, that what had served their grandfathers' turn might very well serve them, was as the law of the Medes and the Persians, and in both villages all proposed innovations met with scant favour. It was bad enough, they said, to see how Plymouth folks was going on: draining one place here to let the water out and build houses upon; and not satisfied but that some other place, high and dry elsewheres, should be flooded and turned into a standing pool. It was to be hoped no judgment wouldn't follow such doings, like the January great storm, when the houses were blown down like ninepins, and the vessels and boats on Foxhole Quay split to flinders. Still, to tamper with the Almighty's works, as if the foundations of the earth must be fashioned so as to please poor mortals, was ticklish business, and one Ferrers and Fairstoke folk would rather be excused from having any hand in. Whether Lucas Rowe shared in these scruples—being a somewhat silent man—is not known; certain it is, that if so, they did not prevent him from appropriating as much of the river bank as he could turn into firm foundation. Foot by foot his encroachments had been carried on, his sheds

rising so gradually and in such piece-meal fashion, that before they were finished people had forgotten when they were commenced; and not until some one a little more sharp-sighted than his neighbours pointed it out, was it remembered how altered that piece of the river bank had become; and then would follow a laugh, a chuckle, and a shaking of the head over 'th' ole good-for-nothin' who'd come there with not so much as 'ud pay the ferry in his pocket.'

A swarthy, oily, mean-featured man, looking much shorter than his height would prove him to be, he stood waiting, wondering whether Roger would come, and what could be the meaning of the message the old woman had sent him.

Phœbe's relation of Mrs. Coode's 'off-hand sort o' way' had kindled the curiosity of the father. He had been inclined before to stand on sufficiently high stilts while stating the preliminaries of his offer, but this indifference made him at once step down. If they could afford to act like that—send word that whether Roger could come or not they couldn't say—it meant his taking another attitude. Evidently Mrs. Coode was a good deal warmer than her neighbours had ever given her credit for; that bit o' property of the cousin's she had always made so light of was more than was reckoned on. No doubt but the old lady knew—and in this she had his sympathy to the full—that if you was given credit for being possessed of anything like tidy means, the wants and the calls from the chapel and them around

was without number. The imaginary prudence of Mrs. Coode in this respect raised her at once in his esteem. He'd had his suspicions—from hints she had dropped two or three times before, questions she had asked, and so on. She was a hearty, well-set-up looking woman—he wondered what her years might be—and he gave a pull to his well-worn waistcoat, pursed himself out with an air of satisfaction, and returned to his reverie.

Mrs. Coode in the meantime had passed the dwellings of her more immediate neighbours, mounted the bit of steep hill, and turning so as to skirt the river again, she had reached the yard by going Undercliff—a way she did not usually favour, except when, as in this instance, she desired to avoid scrutiny.

Posted at a vantage-spot, and favoured by the hour when the few hands he employed were still absent, Mr. Rowe watched the approach of his visitor, his golden opinions gaining strength by seeing that in place of Roger it was the mother.

'Got everything in her own hands,' he at once decided. 'That's why her's come to take the bearin's of what I'm meanin' to offer. Well, Mrs. Coode,' and he threw into his voice all the welcome it was capable of giving—'so you've comed yerself, and not yer son. Where's Roger to, then, eh? Nothin' the matter with un, is there?'

'No, nothin' worthy o' bein' called *the matter*,' was Mrs. Coode's reply; 'but if I was to say he's as I

should like to see him, I should be tellin' what isn't altogether true.'

'Involuntarily Mr. Rowe's greasy palms were rubbed together. He fancied he knew to a nicety the state Roger was in. He couldn't stand that measure of spirit; he'd thought as much when he watched the amount he was taking. Suddenly recollecting the indecorum of his conduct, he gave a twist of his body, feigning that a shiver had gone through him, saying, as he performed the contortion—

'H'm! taken somethin' as has disagreed with him, p'r'aps?'

'Your house, then, will be sot down with the credit of it,' replied Mrs. Coode rather shortly, 'for he hasn't, so far as know by, broke his fast since.'

That was it: Rowe felt convinced on the matter; they were the very symptoms of liquor upsetting a man.

'Phœbe never dropped a sentence of his not bein' the thing.'

'For the very good reason that Phœbe didn't know. I never holds with makin' a to-do about how your family's feelin': if they'm ill, they'm ill, and if they'm well, they'm well; but if 'tis neither one nor t'other, the least said about it the better. In a place like this everything gets abroad, and the next you'll be told is that Roger Coode's very bad. One word always begets twenty.'

'Very true, so it is.'

'For that reason,' continued Mrs. Coode, with

seeming irrelevance, 'I never pays much heed to anything that's flyin' about: there's so many on the watch to catch at every word that's said, makin' mountains out o' molehills.'

'Iss, iss; a very good plan.'

Rowe was beginning to wonder how he had best manage, when Mrs. Coode relieved him by continuing—

'But that's neither here nor there, nor anythin' to do with what I came here for, which was to ask what it is you'm wantin' of Roger.'

She had not intended to blurt out this question so abruptly, but the strain of her assumed part was trying her. What was the good of beating about the bush? Better come at once point-blank to what he meant to offer.

'Well, Mrs. Coode,' and Rowe began caressing his stubbly chin, 'we've knowed one another some years now, you and me, and been as you may say fast friends; at least, that's bin the sense I've took it in—for I always had the feelin' that if there should be any little money or business matter you seemed like to want advice on, that I hoped you'd feel you could mention such to me.'

'Certingly,' said the widow, not over-heartily. 'But, you see, there's my son for me to advise with on.'

'And I've got my daughter. We're equally weighted there, which in some respects is as well where property is concerned.'

Evidently, then, he meant to make a marriage

between Phœbe and Roger a condition of his proposal.

'Well, yes,' said Mrs. Coode, whose talent for finesse was gradually being developed, 'there's always the two sides to every bargain, tho' 'til you know what 'tis a person's meanin' to say, you can't have yer answer ready for 'em.'

'The old cat!' thought Lucas; 'she's tryin' to drive me into a corner.'

''Tisn't, you see, Mrs. Coode'—he was making another effort at bush-beating—'as if you and me was what may be termed aged people.'

'Well, there, Mr. Rowe, you must speak for yourself; with all of us our breath is but in our nostrils. I know what my own feelin's is, but I can only judge of you by your looks;' and the expression she put into her face was the reverse of complimentary.

'Oh, I know I bain't as young as I used to be'—any allusion to death always ruffled Rowe's temper—'but I don't take it that anybody lookin' at me would judge I'd got one leg in the grave not just yet;' and he gave a little snort to ridicule the idea.

'Well, p'raps that 'ud be goin' too far; still, it's a salutary thought for professors to carry about with 'em, for we wasn't sent into the world for nothin' but to heap up riches; and if we was, it can't last for ever; we must leave all behind us one day.'

The idea of uniting their fortunes—which had on one or two previous occasions sufficiently dawned on

Rowe to serve his purpose in giving Aunts Tishy and Tabby a scare—he dismissed altogether. If business was to be spoken of, he had best begin without further delay.

'Well, to go back to Roger,' he said. 'What might he have it in his head to be doin' of now?'

'Oh, I'm his mother, but I ain't inside his head.'

'I'll venture you can give a pretty sharp guess, though, so well as if you was. To speak plain, ther's more here than I've got eyes to look after, and knowin' Roger from a lad to be a sober, steady man, it came into my mind whether he and me mightn't hit it off, by him makin' hisself useful here.'

Mrs. Coode listened without betraying any eager interest.

'I can't say,' she said. 'He's very wedded to the sea, is Roger; he wouldn't leave it, I know, 'cepting 'twas greatly to better hisself.'

'Awh! well, I don't take it that comin' here would be worstin' him.'

'A good deal o' that would hang on what he was wanted for. If 'twas to be at the every beck and call of anybody, Roger's answer would be "No;" that I can tell without askin'.'

Mrs. Coode was gaining courage with this discovery of a newly-found talent. Once entered on the matter, why not try and do her best for Roger? Cope with this man! she felt a strength of purpose, a firmness of character, which made her equal to a dozen such. If Roger joined him, it should be with

the prospect of ultimately becoming master, and an interest, however small, from the beginning.

Mr. Rowe, as was his wont in perplexity, stood looking into his greasy cap while scratching his head.

'What you don't understand, Mrs. Coode, is——'

'No, now never mind what I don't understand, 'cos that I'll promise not to touch 'pon'—Mrs. Coode had decided to seize the bull by the horns—'but 'tis best that you and me should come to plain speakin', Mr. Rowe. My son Roger isn't by no means an ordinary young man; 'tisn't because I's his mother I says it, but whoever you ask will tell you the same. Well, then, if he's to give, for the furtherin' of your ends, his sense, his strength, and his time, he must have his share in the outgoin's and incomin's of your concern.'

Rowe's beady little eyes darted venom. She had just summed up what he had wanted to avoid. 'Jammed in a clench like Jackson!' was his mental ejaculation. 'H'm!' he said, 'yes, that's all very well, but that means money, Mrs. Coode.'

'I dare say it do; and if it had pleased the Lord to give me a ignorant gawpus for a son, the sum asked I should be prepared to pay; but with Roger, not a farthin'! Why, I should be foolish indeed, seein' what he's cost in schoolin' and the book-learnin' he's had; there's many as walks the quarter-deck don't know the half of what he do. Give him what word you like he'll spell it, and he'll say the multiplication table right through, from twice one is

two to twelve times twelve, and more if 'twas there to say, the same as if the book was in his hand. Think o' what that is for business!'

It was of that very thing that Rowe *was* thinking.

'Whatever's mine,' continued Mrs. Coode, 'when I'm dead and gone will be his'n, dear fellow! but I parts with nothin' before; not through no greediness or covetous disposition, but 'cos I knows his value too well.'

Rowe stood quite still, forgetting in his abstraction to have recourse to his usual petty artifices.

'You'd like to think it over,' and Mrs. Coode prepared to take her departure; 'well, that's what I should wish you to do. None of us is in no hurry, and so far as that goes it lies with yourself whether what has passed between us is ever alluded to again. I shan't name it; and Roger does not even know of my comin'.'

Rowe gave a nod of approval.

'I did,' he said, 'so much as name it to Phœbe, for the reason that in the arrangement I'd got in my mind it seemed feasible that the two of 'em might make a match of it together.'

'I'm not gainsayin' that in no way,' and Mrs. Coode vouchsafed to smile condescendingly, as became the desired bridegroom's mother; 'at the same time, I shouldn't interfere. I can leave my son to do his own courtin' without wantin' my finger in the pie.'

CHAPTER XIX

THAT the letter of truth might be kept regarding those 'errants' she had told Roger she needed over the other side, Mrs. Coode, after leaving Rowe, proceeded on towards Fairstoke. She had arranged in her own mind that she would stop at the blacksmith's to inquire something about new hoops for her pail, and fetch a packet of particular starch from the grocer, who lived by the Voss; over these stepping-stones, the tide favouring her, she could return home, not displeased with the figure she had made in her first important business transaction. Little did Mrs. Coode guess how hardly she had been pressed on by her narrow surroundings; in a wider sphere her nature would have expanded. She had stuff in her capable of better things.

Although satisfied with her tactics, her conscience twitted her with scruples, which she was engaged in defending, when, at a turn in the road, she came suddenly face to face with Miss Anne.

'La, miss, what a start you did give me!' for, not waiting for recognition, the little lady had seized her by the hand.

'So I see, Mrs. Coode. I might almost think you'd forgotten me.'

'Yes, but you don't;' and the widow looked at her smilingly. 'You know that ain't possible, miss;

but I was in a reg'lar brown study, as you may say, thinkin' as I was comin' along.'

'Thinking of something you'd get for that wonderful son who's come home;' and Miss Anne laughed pleasantly. 'I've seen him, you know; did he tell you? He *has* improved this time: grown so tall and brown and handsome. Somebody's proud enough of him, I know.' Mrs. Coode's eyes filled with tears—a very unusual weakness in her, as Miss Anne well knew, and she hastened to avoid seeming to notice it by saying sympathetically, 'Ah, dear Mrs. Coode, I have just come from seeing a very different mother—that poor suffering Mrs. Hockaday.'

The mention of that name seemed to send through Mrs. Coode a shiver; again she was looking through the gray mist of morning at Ned Hockaday and—another. In the excitement of all that had been going on, she had forgotten that terrible nightmare: suddenly it had come back to her.

'Well, then, Miss Anne,' she said, her voice altered to a hard, dry tone, 'I must say that I really do wonder—yes, I know, you'm goin' to begin on the old story of preachin' up charity, but we don't agree, and we never shall. If the refusin' to mix up with evil livers and to keep my eyes shut on vicious habits is to be counted uncharitable, well, then, uncharitable I am, and, please the Lord, shall always continue to be.'

Miss Anne felt inclined to point a moral with this final sentence, but calling better judgment to her aid,

she refrained. Her best strength, as she well knew, lay in her gentle pleading. Condemnation had best come from a higher Power.

'But just now, Mrs. Coode, when the poor woman is so seriously ill—for at any moment her disease might be fatal—one cannot help feeling sorry to see her in any fresh trouble. I'm certain no mother could, because it's through her son; and, scapegrace as they say he is, she dotes on him, you know.'

Miss Anne thought she had arrested Mrs. Coode's attention, and therefore hastened on to say, 'I dare say it has reached you that he has been for a long time very much in love with that beautiful Loyalty George. Well, last night he seems to have discovered that he has a rival, and a favoured one; and the poor mother says he came home somewhere between three and four this morning, just like one out of his mind, declaring that then and there he would leave the place and go off to sea, and so—— But you're not well, Mrs. Coode! What is the matter?' for Mrs. Coode had staggered back, and was leaning for support against the hedge.

'Nothin', nothin',' she gasped; ''tis my breath; 't often goes with mountin' a hill.'

Miss Anne's alarm betrayed itself in her face. 'Oh, dear,' she said, 'perhaps I ought not to have kept you standing. When you feel recovered, take my arm; let me see if I cannot help you in some way.' Comparing their relative sizes Mrs. Coode smiled, but it was affectionately.

'Don't you trouble yourself, my dear, about me; I'm all right again now. I fancy I must have been standin' a bit unsteady.'

'As long as you're not ill, never mind; but you frightened me. I thought your face had turned pale.'

'Has Hockaday's son gone, then?'

Mrs. Coode asked the question so eagerly, that Miss Anne took the manner as assumed in order to reassure her of Mrs. Coode's complete recovery.

'No, I hope not yet, because of the poor mother; but I greatly fear he will, and it is very likely to kill her.'

'And if so, Miss Anne, is it of any great matter? She ain't doin' much good with the life th' Almighty's vouchsafed to her; on the contrary, it seems to me she's a usin' it to add to her burden of sin.'

Miss Anne looked pained. 'I dare say,' she said, 'it is hard for you to be lenient to her, respected and looked up to as you have always been, with a son brought up to be a blessing to you and a credit to those he lives among. Roger is a great, great favourite of mine, a sterling, worthy fellow! I don't suppose since he was born he has ever given you an hour's pain. Be thankful for that, dear Mrs. Coode; all lives are not cast in such pleasant places.'

Mrs. Coode did not reply, and Miss Anne, looking at her watch, said she must bid her good-bye, as she had to hurry on. 'And I shall come and see you very soon, as I expect there will be some news for me to hear. A little bird has whispered to me the name of Phœbe.'

Mrs. Coode held the hand given her detainingly.

'I wants to take back, Miss Anne, those words I said about Mrs. Hockaday. Whatever her failin's is, no doubt she's got the feelin's of a mother. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and rather than condemn, 'tis more becomin' in me to feel pity for her.'

Miss Anne pressed the hand that held hers, and understanding that Mrs. Coode would rather she made no comment, proceeded on her way. Mrs. Coode did the same. It was the first time she had ever permitted herself to feel sympathy with a sinner.

Her spirits overcast and tormented with fresh apprehensions, Mrs. Coode's impulse was to hurry home out of sight of her neighbours, but this plan her sense told her it would be ill-judged to follow. If any gossip had got abroad, she was well assured she should hear it from some she saw. How sharply the thorn of memory pricked her, recalling the harsh judgment she had given to some of these women's children. Never had she pretended not to see the screen put in the hope of keeping the prodigal's faults out of view; her keen eyes had spotted the veriest speck, and her ears had been deaf to any plea. Nothing but the unvarnished truth was listened to by her.

To-day how thankful would she have been to open a loophole of escape to any who had gone wrong, but to-day no one seemed to have any shortcomings to relate: the one thing uppermost with all was congratulation on the return of her son.

How happy she must be to have Roger home, how proud of such a young man! Did he want to stay ashore? Had he had enough of the sea? Was he meanin' to settle down? Each one intended to look him up; several announced they would do so later in the day.

Mrs. Coode felt that at any sacrifice the presence of visitors must be spared Roger; to see him in his present condition would be to spring a mine.

'Well, for a little—until you sees him about then—I shall ask you to let him be. I dessay some of 'ee will be laughin' at me for mother's fidgets, but to my mind he ain't quite the thing. *You* may be able to give some meanin' to it, Mr. Bates,' she said, addressing an old sailor; 'he ain't inclined for food, is shivery and sittin' over the fire. I can't make it out; it ain't like my Roger.'

'I knaws what the matter is;' the old fellow, as Mrs. Coode knew, was not displeased to be appealed to as an authority. ''Tis change of climate, that's what that is, with maybe a touch o' fever. I've had it myself many's the time.'

'Get away with 'ee do,' exclaimed some of the bystanders. 'Fever! why, 'tis enough to frighten anybody.'

'No, no,' said Mrs. Coode. 'I'd rather listen to what Mr. Bates has got to say. I quite understands. I'm not one to take foolish fancies when nothink's meant.'

'Surely, no,' said Bates reassuringly. 'What I

means by fever is hot and cold by turns, shivery and the like. Give un a good glass o' hot spirits, missis, that's his best cure; and '—with a more than meaning wink towards a couple of men passing—'if you can get it fetched from the Cat and Fiddle, 'twill be all the better for he.'

Nodding to old Bates, one of the passers made some remark to his fellow.

'What's that?' said Mrs. Coode hastily. 'What was it he said? I thought I heard some reference to me.'

'Not worth payin' no attention to,' answered one of the women. ''Twas somethin', I couldn't quite catch what, ceptin' "his mother the Methody," I heerd the offside one say.'

'"The Methody!"' echoed Mrs. Coode; 'good for they if they was Methodys too.'

'Awh! they'm two old hobblers,' said Bates. 'You may meet 'em takin' their ways down to Cot every night so reg'lar as it comes.'

Mrs. Coode's heart stood still. Could they have seen Roger, been perhaps in his company? Oh, how terrible was this sickly fear!

'I think I must be gettin' home,' she said, 'or else the tide 'll be on the turn, and that won't do. So good-bye;' and she went on and down the steep slip in front of the Swan, forgetting in her abstraction the starch she had come that way round after.

Now that she had parted with her neighbours on the other side, she could for a brief space recall some

of the things told her by Miss Anne, foremost being this trouble of young Hockaday's. Without doubt, the rival meant was Roger. In her heart of hearts Mrs. Coode well knew that Loyalty loved him truly, passionately, with a depth and fervour Phœbe Rowe could never give to any man. But how was it with her son? That his fancy had been caught she had seen, but by his going away she had more than understood that this fancy he had taken the resolution to overcome; if not, why did he go? Now that she could reason more calmly, she did not believe that during his absence he had been deceiving her the while. What could it be? Would he speak of it to her? The hard, cold feeling was coming back again, and this in spite of a sense of relief that, so far, no one seemed to know that which in her nervous dread she had feared the whole place would ring with.

Oh, it was too cruel that her cup of happiness should be dashed from her at the very moment when it seemed full! when all her plans were succeeding, all her prayers being answered; and by Roger, her boy, the one great passion and devotion of her life. To herself she always defended the passing fancy she had had for her husband by saying she must have been 'overlooked;'—she would not allow that she had been caught by his good-looking face and winning tongue, and had been deceived by the belief that she was strong enough to reform whatever might be wrong in him. Gentleness, patience, might have effected a cure; but these remedies Mrs. Coode never

tried. From the first she had been intolerant, unyielding; and as matters went from bad to worse, there was little else between husband and wife but strife and discord. His death—when she had recovered its first shock—had been a relief to her. She tried to invest his memory with tenderness by speaking of him as her child's father, pouring out on the child all the tenderness the father had been deprived of.

Very seldom did Mrs. Coode enter upon any details of those days, to which she referred as the time when she was not 'in the bondage of the Lord'; but let the subject of unequal marriages be broached, and she at once took the topic into her hands, giving everyone to understand that no one in the place was so competent to speak as she herself.

The old saw that 'marriages are made in heaven,' depended, Mrs. Coode would say, 'very much 'pon how they was set about by the people on earth; and to choose a wife or husband on account of good looks or comely shape, showed about as much sense as being struck with somethin' in a shop-window and buyin' it straight off, without once havin' it in your hand.' And yet, holding these opinions, there had been times when, looking at Phœbe Rowe's commonplace, meaningless face, a positive repugnance had run through Mrs. Coode, and she felt her manner snappish and irritable against her will; and in the same way she had been stirred while looking at Loyalty—appealed to, as most strong natures are—

by the wondrous power of beauty. This sensitiveness Mrs. Coode deplored as the weakness of the flesh, the movings of Satan, the signs of not having completely thrown off the inner man; but the feeling always made her more lenient to Roger, and more inflamed than ever against Loyalty.

CHAPTER XX

MRS. COODE returned to find Roger still sitting as she had left him. At sight of her, he made a show of moving and of taking an interest in what she had been doing; but it was a poor pretence, and one he had soon to lay aside. His head felt as heavy as if a pig of lead was inside it, his eyes positively refused to meet the light, and his loathing of food in any shape was so great, that he felt it incumbent on him to give some explanation of why he was unable to join his mother at the dinner which she was preparing.

'I'm reg'larly out o' sorts to-day,' he began, giving a little shiver as he spoke; 'tain't like me to feel so heavy and dull.'

'Yes, I see you wasn't yourself,' Mrs. Coode made answer, 'and for that reason when two or three spoke o' droppin' in on you, I said, "No, I'd sooner we was left be by our two selves this evenin'."'

Roger smiled his gratitude, and, touched by his mother's forbearance, he said somewhat sheepishly, 'I reckon you can make a guess, mother, that last night I wasn't so as I should like you to have seed me.'

'No?' said Mrs. Coode, as if the statement made was new to her; then, finding Roger did not speak, she added in a dry tone, 'Oh, I suppose there's few men but has been overtook once, if not more, in their lives.'

'Then I've had my once,' said Roger, 'and *that* once will serve me, I hope, as long as I can remember. 'Tis a pity all drunkards don't pay for it as I do; there'd be more sober men than there is now.'

'That 'ud be but a poor motive to keep straight for,' said Mrs. Coode severely; 'them as shrinks from sufferin' now, should remember that they can't escape it hereafter;' then, noticing that though she had made an intentional pause Roger remained silent, she continued—heaving a lugubrious sigh to herald her statement—'I minds the time when 'twas my boy's boast that he hadn't never lost hisself in liquor.'

'Yes,' said Roger, 'your boy, like many another one, was a mighty fine fellow so long as nothin' come to try him.'

'As to the matter of the drink,' said Mrs. Coode, shifting her tactics, ''taint that I lay so much weight on that. There's more harm got by the quality, and the company you drinks among, than the quantity of liquor you pours down your throat.'

Roger's face sharpened with the effort he made to restrain an irritable answer; and his mother, feeling it wiser that the thorn she had planted should be left to rankle without further pushing it in, abruptly

turned the subject by saying, 'If you was to put it to me what would bring you ease, I should say go and lie yourself back in that elbow-chair there, and try to get off into a good sound sleep; you'll wake fresher, and after a cup of tea then, will most like feel a different bein'.'

Roger showed his approval by at once taking her advice, and Mrs. Coode, who had scarcely more appetite than her son, was glad—under the excuse of leaving him quiet—to go into the other room, where she could eat as little as she pleased without enduring his scrutiny.

Left to himself, Roger remained resting with closed eyes. The sleep which, when he was sitttng up had seemed so heavy on him as to stultify his faculties, now that it was courted, refused to come. With bodily ease of position his senses appeared to revive, and again in imagination he was going through the scenes of the previous night, and everything he recollected tortured him.

Hitherto Roger had been very hard on those who stumbled and fell. From the height of his pinnacle he had let fly the very sharpest arrows of his scorn on those miserable weak ones who made resolutions one day, to break them the next. Little did anyone guess at the true motive power of this intolerance—which was looked on as the outcome of superior integrity and morality. That such a man could have any sympathy with vice would have been deemed impossible; yet Roger could have told a

different tale. His passions were as dangerous as an Alpine slope. Let him but once slip his hold and set the ball of desire rolling, and it would most surely end by carrying him down to the lowest depths of degradation.

He felt that on the previous night this descent had been begun. True, he was now sick—out of sorts and bodily ill; in spite of which, every now and again, as memory stirred up different scenes, a sort of mental exhilaration seized hold of him. A sense of triumph at the recollection of a fight he had had with one man—what they had fought about he could not tell—but his pulses quickened at the mad thirst he had had to take the fellow's life. And the next moment he was in a cold sweat of agonized fear. Good God! if he had been let murder him! Every fibre and nerve relaxed—he could barely keep back the groans that oppressed him. . . . And in the midst of this abasing remorse, a vision of Loyalty came back—Loyalty, entreating, imploring, trying by every means to restrain him. Yes, but still, was not she the cause of it all? Every phrensy, folly, fancy, was prompted in some way by his love for her. Never before had he seen her look so beautiful, so attractive. Never before had he openly claimed her as his own, while racked by the jealous fear that some other one might rob him of his treasure. So completely had he felt enslaved, that there was no crime he would not have committed at her bidding; black would have been white, had she said so—evil

would be good, so that it called forth a smile from her. . . . Was this love? Roger frowned denial. Not the love a sober-minded man desired to feel for the woman he called wife, the companion of his home, the mother of his children. For a time Roger seemed lost in the censures he was passing. Suddenly some chord in the mind recalled this siren as he had seen her singing at his request a favourite song; the tune returned to him, back with it came a jumble of the words, to arrange which into the order of verse seemed in its turn to absorb Roger.

It was a description of the famous fight between the *Rainbow* and the renowned pirate, Captain Ward.

'So early in the morning
This bloody fight began,
It lasted from the rising
To the setting of the sun.

'"Fight on, fight on," cries Captain Ward,
"Your sport well pleases me;
For tho' you fight for a whole month,
Your master I will be."'

At this point the remembered attitude of the singer, and the spirit she had put into the song, made a smile steal over Roger's face. For an instant he forgot that she was not there, before him; he tried to rouse himself to disentangle another verse.

'"Go home, go home," cries Captain Ward,
"And tell your King from me,
If he reigns King upon the land
'Tis I'll reign King at sea."'

But his ideas were growing confused, his senses overpowered; sleep had mastered him, he was already in the land of dreams.

'What is it? What's the matter, Roger?' Mrs. Coode came hurrying in from the little parlour.

'Matter!' said Roger, starting up. 'Eh—who—what d'ye mean?'

'You gave a sort o' cry, 'twixt that and a moan. My heart's all in a flutter.'

'I was dreamin', then, for I've been asleep ever since you left me. Why, it's gettin' dark! Whatever's the time?'

'That's more than I can tell you.' Mrs. Coode spoke in a relieved tone. 'I b'lieve I must have had a bit of a doze myself. Anyways, what with that and ruminatin', the time's weared away without seemin' long.'

'I don't believe I should have roused up this side of to-morrow mornin',' said Roger, 'if your comin' in hadn't woke me.'

'Then I'm sorry I did,' said his mother; 'although, seein' how little you've made use of to-day, it's high time you put somethin' in the shape o' victuals inside you.'

'And I'm more ready to do it too, now. Can't I help anyways in gettin' the tea, mother? Where's the kettle? Is the water handy?'

'No, no; now sit down, do, and leave the tea to me; you'll only be more of a hindrance than a help.'

Not feeling that he had any great stock of energy at his command, Roger obeyed; and in a very short time the meal was ready, and the mother and son were seated at the table.

During the meal each of them remained almost silent; Roger because he felt no inclination to talk, Mrs. Coode because she was desirous to speak of her visit to Lucas Rowe, but could not see her way to lead up to the matter. Finally, she seized on a moment when—the tea-things cleared away—she was standing at the cupboard, half-turned from Roger, to say:

'I didn't mention it to 'ee, did I, that I stepped up to Mr. Rowe's buildin'-yard myself this mornin'?'

She was prepared for Roger expressing annoyance or surprise, but, occupied by other thoughts, he merely answered:

'What did he say? Did he seem put out in anyways?'

'Well, he was, and he wasn't.'

Mrs. Coode began to wonder how much it would be wise to tell her son. If by her recital she could manage to rouse his ambition, who could say what might come of it? She possessed herself of the ball of worsted after which she had been apparently searching, brought out her stocking-knitting, and seated herself opposite to Roger.

'I think I told you, Roger,' she began, 'that I'd got a kind of inklin' as to what it was that Rowe was wantin' of you.'

Roger's face of absolute indifference was far from encouraging.

'Well,' he said, 'and did you find your inklin' was wrong?'

'No, for the reason that I ain't one to get notions into my head without knowin' how they comed there.' Mrs. Coode spoke rebukingly. 'But what I did find was, that I'm quite equal to takin' Lucas Rowe's measure. That he's one of they you must cow, or cower before, I saw with half an eye; so I thinks to myself, I won't wait, my gentleman, for *your* feather to show which way the wind's veerin', but lay hold on the tiller myself, and steer straight for the point I've set my mind upon.'

'Your mind, mother?'

Roger's attention was caught by Mrs. Coode's manner.

'Yes, Roger, my mind. P'r'aps the time's come when 'tis best I should speak plain. While you've been absent from home, I've made it my nightly prayer and my daily petition that, if so be th' Almighty saw fit, He'd grant that a openin' in that business might be made for you, so that before I was called away I might see you comfortably settled in a respectable walk of life with—well, I may as well say it, a thrifty wife and a home of your own. To-day the openin's been made; the remainin' lies with you. It depends on your yes or no whether you stop to the end o' your days a ordinary seafarin' man, or, to once, go into that buildin'-yard as a

kind o' partner, with the understandin' that when, please God, Mr. Rowe is gone, *you* stands master of the entire concern.'

There was a moment's pause, and then Roger, taking from his mouth the pipe which he had just lighted, laid it on the table, jumped up, and began to walk up and down the room. Without seeming to look, Mrs. Coode's keen eyes followed him.

'I don't want to remind my son,' she continued, thinking this was the point she had best press upon him, 'how I've strove and toiled, or what I've done for him; all I say is, I'm gettin' up in years. My span of life can't be long. Is strangers to close my eyes? is their hands to smooth my dyin' pillow?'

Roger did not speak, but he tugged at his neckerchief as if he were suffocating. This, that his mother had just told him, was a revelation—a revelation which showed him that both their hearts had been fired by the same ambition. True it was that Roger hated old Rowe, but the yard had always been an object of envy to him. It was almost the only means he saw of getting out of the rut of a life which in many ways was distasteful. When he spoke against Rowe, sneered at and despised him, at the bottom of his dislike was the certainty that the miserly old curmudgeon would never be brought to part with a nail-paring that might bring him in gain—never be brought to see the advantages that must arise out of his connection with a younger and better-informed man.

'I dessay,' continued Mrs. Coode, still watching her son, 'that there's them as would look on it as a matter of course that you couldn't have Rowe's business without you took Rowe's daughter. Well, that ain't surprisin', seein' it has entered into the head o' me and of her father; but this mornin', when he dropped a hint in that quarter, I put my foot down on it at once, and I give him to understand that the business I was come upon hadn't nothin' to do with a wife for my son or a husband for his daughter. That Phœbe was, as she always would be, a favourite with me; but'—and here Mrs. Coode paused until Roger looked over at her—'I could leave my son to do his own courtin', without wantin' my finger in the pie.'

'Mother!'

Roger had flung himself down before her; with his head buried in her lap, he was sobbing like a boy.

'Help me! help me!' he cried.

'I will! I will!'

The strong man she had called son was gone; she was again pressing to her bosom her helpless child. The sight of his tears moved the very depths of her maternal love. Even as a boy, only on a few occasions had she ever seen Roger overcome by grief. Like herself, he had a contempt for frequent tears, and always sought to hide all visible signs of emotion.

'What is it, my son?' she said soothingly; 'don't be afraid to tell your mother. All I asks is that

nothin's kep' back from me. . . . I knows all about the drink, if that's what's causin' of 'ee worry.'

Roger lifted his head, giving a shake of denial as he dashed the tears from his eyes.

'No, no,' he said; 'I ain't got no fear of drink; it ain't that;' and he rose to his feet, pulled over a chair, and sat down. 'I'm reg'larly knocked abroad in body and mind; anybody 'ud think I was a little pulin' maid, 'stead of a strong, hulkin' man.'

'Us all have a feelin' o' that sort sometimes,' said Mrs. Coode sympathetically.

'Yes, but you can't never gauge what I means,' said Roger; 'you never feels as if the devil had got hold of 'ee.'

'Oh, don't make no mistake there, Roger; the devil knows where I lives.'

Roger's face implied his disbelief in this statement.

''Tis,' he said, 'as if there was two of myself inside me, and they two pullin' two different ways: the one all for hoistin' up, the other for draggin' down; and by turns I lend a hand to each of 'em.'

'Yes, that is the flesh warrin' against the spirit.'

'And the flesh is the bettermost man of the two.'

'And always will be, Roger, while you fights in the armour of your own strength.'

Roger sighed hopelessly, as if he found no consolation in this assurance.

'You speaks of two men pullin' two different ways inside you,' said Mrs. Coode, breaking silence again; 'are you so sure that one of them men isn't a woman?

Oh, Roger, my dear,' she continued, altering her tone, 'I could never tell you how 't 'as cut me to the quick to see you take up with that Loyalty George again. I thought, when you went off as you did, there was an end to that for ever.'

'I thought the same,' said Roger, 'and could have swored to it, till I come back here—and seed her.'

Mrs. Coode pursed up her mouth and shook her head, as if communicating with some power unseen.

'What can I,' she exclaimed, 'what could anybody think of a girl whose first act is to entice a man down among a low lot, and lead him on to put too much drink inside him?'

'Loyalty hadn't no hand in that, mother; she tried everythin' she knew to keep me from it; she even begged me for sake of you not to touch another drop.'

Mrs. Coode's lip curled contemptuously.

'Oh, so well shove anybody into the water, and then beg 'em not to get drown'd; but the blame 'ud lie at your door all the same.'

Then, seeing an expression she knew come into her son's face, she hastened to add, 'I don't say 'tis altogether her fault; p'raps if I did I should say wrong; but what with the disgrace of the father's awful end, the way she was brought up, and the evil-livin' lot she's mixed up with, why, it don't bear a thought, Roger. You can't gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles; and so well expect both, one and the other, as to find virtue and

modesty and truth—not to mention nothin' higher—in Loyalty George.'

Roger had been listening with his head bent; he raised it now, and looked at his mother.

'I'd stake my every hope of salvation that there ain't a soul livin' who could with truth breathe a word of ill-fame against her.'

Mrs. Coode raised her eyes as if, should this venture be accepted, her son's doom was sealed.

'No,' continued Roger, 'of that I'm certain. If I wasn't,' and his hands worked nervously, 'I'd jump over the cliff out there, if I couldn't any other way be done with her.'

Mrs. Coode heaved a despondent sigh.

'Then I suppose there's an end to all my hopes, and plans, and prayers for you?'

Roger stretched out his hand and laid it on her shoulder.

'Oh, mother, don't think that I don't feel for you; haven't I had the same wish myself? Though I wouldn't have owned to it, I never looked on that yard without a feelin' of envy. I used to think if 'twas mine what I'd do, what I'd alter, the different things I'd plan, even to the house I'd got in my mind's eye for you.'

Mrs. Coode burst into a passion of tears.

'And to think that all these dreamin's might come to pass,' she cried excitedly, 'only for her—her who's ruined my boy's peace o' mind—dragged 'un down into the dust and mire, and 'll end in

breakin' the hearts of both of us.' And overcome by the violence of her emotion, she sobbed convulsively.

Roger put his other arm around her, and drew her to him.

'Bear with me, my son,' she said; 'try and bear with me, Roger. My spirits is broke down.' Raising her head, she looked into his face, framing it by putting her hand under his chin. 'Twenty-five years come Michaelmas day, and never as boy or man gived me knowin'ly an hour's pain 'ceptin' in this one thing. Oh, Roger, must it be? Am I never to hold up my head with pride again? Tell me—let me know the worst—how far has it gone?'

'No, no,' said Roger soothingly, 'don't ask me now. I can't rightly tell what passed, or what I may be held to.' He was so moved by sight of his mother's distress that his own anguish was lost in hers.

''Tain't all settled, then?' she said pleadingly.

'Mother, you forces me again to own that last night I wasn't master of myself. I know I let my tongue run very fast; I know there was others present to listen to what I said.'

'Others, most like, more drunk than you.'

'No; but if they was, Loyalty wasn't so. She knows I asked her to marry me, and that I spoke of her as my promised wife the whole evenin' through.'

'And as such,' said Mrs. Coode severely, 'she could barely let the door close upon you afore she was flyin' into the arms of Ned Hockaday. I was watchin' 'em; I seed her.'

'Arms of Ned Hockaday! Mother, is that true?'

'True in so far that he wanted her to.'

'Wantin' and havin',' said Roger sternly, 'is two very different things, as you know, mother.'

Mrs. Coode had never heard 'He comes too near who comes to be denied,' but her answer was prompted by the same spirit.

'And I know too, Roger, havin' been a maid myself, that no man never had none of them free ways with me. They's pretty sure of where to take their liberties afore they ventures to offer them.'

But Roger let her sting pass unheeded. He was searching his memory to recollect how he had got home. Hockaday had come with him, but surely not Loyalty! He could not have been in such a state as not to remember her!

'Are you sure, mother, that you ain't mistook—sure that it was Loyalty you saw?'

'As sure as that I am standin' here,' said Mrs. Coode solemnly. 'She was just by the palin's, and Hockaday——'

'Oh, I don't mind Hockaday; he don't trouble me. If he can get her he's welcome to her.'

'Welcome!' exclaimed Mrs. Coode excitedly; 'why, if I thought such a thing would come to pass, I'd fall on my bended knees and bless the day tha saw his birth, so as he'd take her to the world's end, or anywheres where she never 'ud be set eyes on again by you or me!'

Roger remained silently looking at her; something

in his face seemed to give a spark of hope to Mrs. Coode, for she said pleadingly, 'Down somewheres in the bottommost depths of your heart, can't 'ee find a Amen to that prayer, Roger?'

'I don't feel as if I'd got a heart, mother, or a hope, or a happiness. Everythin' seems gone from me. I must be off to bed now, and bed's the best place for you. We'll hope the outlook will be a bit brighter to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE day which had been so trying to Roger had not been without its difficulties to Loyalty. She had wandered about unable to settle to anything, undertaking a dozen odd jobs, to begin and give them up again. Now her young strength would be tested by pulling up a heavy anchor, taking the boat to land, and running it high and dry ashore. The heavy nets spread out on the sloping grass above she would drag along to a spot where they might dry better. The crab-pots, stored away in winter—some needing repairs, others remaking—these she got out with the stock of withy ready to do them; but to sit quiet did not suit her, and she would jump up in quest of some more stirring occupation.

Some business had taken her grandfather to Boro Island. He had set off early, so that Loyalty's time was her own, to dispose of as best suited her. During

the morning she had found opportunity to go over to the ferry, hoping that Dunchy might have picked up some news; but the expedition he had taken at her bidding had failed signally. 'I went out to wance,' he told her, 'so soon as ever you was gone, but 'twas Saltash luck with me—a good wettin' and no fish.'

Loyalty sighed. 'I wonder,' she said, 'if any on 'em has said anything; and if so, what th' others thinks and says.'

'What, 'bout a man havin' a good skinful o' liquor inside un? Why, says as I do—a good job for he!'

'Oh, but you don't understand, Dunchy.'

'No, not in that ways; I habn't often got the chance to. *I* doan't find folks so free. It 'ud be different, I s'pose, if I was a smart young chap agen; then I should go sweetheartin', and be thought to be made o' sugarstick.'

'Would 'ee come sweetheartin' to me, Dunchy?'

'Awh, I doan't doubt but I should be as big a fule as the rest be.'

'You wasn't never married, was 'ee?'

'Well, not to say ezactly—no. I've had the woman in me eye, and the ring bought to fit her finger, but it never went no further. Whether 'twas she didn't come up to the scratch, or whether 'twas me, has now slipped my mind; but it happened for the best, I dessay, for her was Nickie Glubb's sister, and as handy with her two fistes as he was with his'n.'

Loyalty smiled. 'It didn't break neither o' your hearts, then?'

'Hearts! No—nor she didn't break my head, which was a good deal more in her way. You take my word for 't, Loyalty,' and Dunchy nodded his head sagaciously, 'hearts ain't broke so easy; it takes more than love to bust they.'

'Not if the love's true, it don't. There's a plenty in songs, and in story-books, too, 'bout "maidens havin' hung their heads and died"'—Loyalty was making a quotation from a melancholy ditty she sung—'and all because of men's deceivin'.'

'Iss, there's a good bit sot down to the men that would equal apply as well to the women. If

> '"Boy's love is maiden's ruin,
> Half of it's their own doin'."'

With which sage saw Dunchy nodded her 'Farewell' —a passenger was hailing him with 'Over,' and he pushed off his boat to fetch his fare.

Loyalty had been seized with the wish to cross with him, but before she could decide he had gone. At another time she would have waited or wandered on to Rowton, but the fear that she might meet Roger made her hesitate. She did not want to see him in, perhaps, the presence of others until they had had a meeting when no one was near. All the day she had been combating with hope and fear—hope, that he had meant what he said; fear, that he might fancy she would think so. She would not for the world that he should feel bound by any promise given under the circumstances he was in last night—

and so far as she could she had entreated some, and laughed others, into a promise of silence. Her hardest task had been with Ned Hockaday; for though she could not return his love, she had a tender feeling for the young fellow, who was his mother's darling, and Loyalty was very fond of Mrs. Hockaday.

Too much her slave to hold out long against any request she made of him, Ned had finally consented to see Roger safely home, and also to keep silent as to his rival's visit to The Cot, and what he had said there; but he added a rider to these concessions, which was, that seeing now for himself that Roger Coode was preferred before him, he should delay no longer, but at once put into execution his long-made threat of running away to sea.

This going to sea had been the bugbear of his poor mother's life—the nightmare to all her dreams of happiness, which centred themselves on the hope that he would settle down, get married, and have children who would cluster round her knees and draw her from her fatal temptation. This liking of her son for Loyalty was in no way displeasing to Mrs. Hockaday; Loyalty was in all respects the very wife she would have chosen for him, and she summed her up as 'Loving in her ways, handsome in her looks, with a voice as sweet as a singing bird.' Who could keep a husband at home if such as Loyalty failed? It would have been Mrs. Hockaday's pride to give welcome to such a daughter-in-law.

Bound to keep silence by the fear of 'angering' her son, the fond mother could only push on the suit by affording constant opportunities for Ned and Loyalty to meet; and in the midst of this one-sided wooing Mrs. Hockaday was struck down by her fatal illness, which made her more than ever anxious to speed on the match.

Knowing her son's emotional temperament, she had hitherto attributed the ups and downs of his spirits to the fact that the course of true love never did run smooth; but after the task poor Ned had of seeing Roger Coode home, he had presented himself in such a terrible state of despair, that the mother at once detected this must be consequent on a much more serious affair than usual; and questioning him closely, Ned, only too ready to share his burden of trouble, revealed the crushing fact that he had made the discovery of the existence of a rival. Who this was Ted would not tell, but plainly someone who lived in the place, because he, as a motive for leaving his sick mother, declared it impossible he should stay and see them with one another.

Sworn to keep silent on the subject to Loyalty, woman-like, Mrs. Hockaday set her wits at work to discover how she might temporize, so as to serve her son; and Miss Anne coming in during the afternoon to visit her, she confided to her her distress, and implored her aid.

Miss Anne, whose heart was ever in sympathy with despondent love, raised Mrs. Hockaday to the

seventh heaven, by offering herself as mediator in the cause. 'Would you like me to speak to Loyalty herself?' she said.

'Oh, miss!' was sighed out in reply. It was to Mrs. Hockaday as if an angel had made her the offer. With her heart brimming over with gratitude to this beneficent being, who had never permitted her to suspect that she was aware of her many failings—although the poor sinner knew well they had been repeated to her, every one—Mrs. Hockaday felt sure Miss Anne's pleading would be irresistible.

'I'll do so,' said Miss Anne. 'I wonder how I could catch her, and where.'

'I sent our boy Johnny to tell her to come here, as I wanted to speak to her very partickler.'

'Well, and did she say she would come?'

'Yes; he brought back word she'd start almost directly after he. He was here—well, it couldn't ha' bin ten minutes afore you comed, miss.'

'Then the best thing would be that I should try and meet her. Which is her usual way?'

'Oh, Miss Anne, it don't seem possible that I can so far presume as to worrit you! I feel, in so much as even makin' mention of what's troublin' me, I'm forgettin' myself in your presence.'

Miss Anne gently smoothed the puffed-up hand that lay nearest to her on the quilt. 'My poor sufferer,' she said, 'I think you know that to give ease to your mind in any way would be a real pleasure to me; besides which, then I shall find,

perhaps, some favour you can do for me. "One good turn deserves another"—eh, isn't it so?'

The tears which came welling up into Mrs. Hockaday's eyes were her only answer.

'Come now,' said Miss Anne, rising, 'we must lose no more time. You tell me how she is likely to come, and I'll set off in search of her. It's not at all a task to me; I always enjoy having a good look at Loyalty. I'm a very great admirer of beauty.'

With Miss Anne's knowledge of the country, Mrs. Hockaday had no difficulty in indicating the road by which, in all probability, Loyalty would come. No such road would be found now; the farmer cultivating his crops, the landowner preserving his game, have given the face of the land an aspect very different from that in which nature moulded it. To get from Fairstoke to Fairstoke Bay there are roads to drive by, lanes to walk through; but the zig-zag path by which Miss Anne reached the vast hummock of fern and furze, stretching out then to that bold bluff against which the mighty waves of the Atlantic still beat and break, has vanished, and the yellow gorse is replaced by golden grain, and the sea-birds' cry hushed by the ploughman's whistle.

Miss Anne's progress, as we know, was a little retarded by her meeting with Mrs. Coode. After she had bade the old lady good-bye she began to walk more briskly on. The hedged-in road of the village, with its low white houses scattered along, was soon left behind, and then came the narrow

path fringed with brambles that grew out from jagged rocks half-hidden by a network of moss and small fern. The bracken, shorn of its summer glory, made great brown patches, which looked darker further up, because there the grass grew more green.

The top reached, Anne paused and drew a long breath—not that her respiration was at fault, but because of an emotion natural to her—the heritage of her sailor father—an exceeding great love for the boundless sea. Its sight filled her with gladness, and made her spirits rise so that her walk was almost turned into a run, so buoyantly did she move along. Lost in a hundred fancies, she had walked some considerable distance before she recollected how far she had come—much farther than she intended—and recalling the motive which had brought her, she concluded she must have missed Loyalty.

'Let me see,' she said, consulting her watch—'past four. Oh, an hour will get me back again. It isn't often I am this way; I'll go on a little further—well, just as far as there;' and she fixed on what looked like a grass-covered projection of rock. Coming nearer, she saw that a figure was leaning, looking over it; nearer still, that the figure was a girl; and the girl, she of whom she had come in search, Loyalty George. Miss Anne was close to her before Loyalty seemed aware that anyone was approaching; then she slowly turned her head round, and, recognising it was Miss Anne, she sprang down, and stood as if surprise had made her dumb.

'Why, Loyalty, I believe I startled you!—did I?' Now she had found her, Miss Anne began to think how she should open her mission. Before, it had seemed so easy; now she felt a difficulty. Looking more fixedly, she noticed the girl's eyes were moist; her cheeks, too, were wet with tears. Her kindly heart at once prompted sympathy.

'My poor girl, what is the matter? You've been crying. You're not in any trouble, are you? Tell me.'

The soft tone touched Loyalty; there was a fear that her tears would begin to fall again. To master this weakness she gave her head a determined shake.

'No, miss, not any.'

'That's right.' Then, giving her another glance, she added, 'Quite sure? Nothing to make you unhappy?'

''Tain't that was makin' me cry,' said Loyalty evasively; then, feeling a little more explanation would be proper, she continued, ''Twas foolishness made me do that; I'm often like it—I wish I wasn't.'

Miss Anne smiled pleasantly. 'What was foolishness, Loyalty, eh? Come, I've a great sympathy with foolish people—I'm foolish myself very often. Why, this afternoon, when I reached the top and came in sight of the sea, looking so grand and beautiful, it sent me into such spirits that I could have danced and sung as I came along. There would have been a sight! What *would* you have thought of me?'

'Why,' said Loyalty, her voice trembling, ''tis like that, miss, what made me cry! Other times 'tis as you say; I laughs, and jumps, and flings myself about, and screeches—oh! you should hear me!—but 'tis all for joy; and the same now, standin' there, lookin' and thinkin' of this mornin', when I watched the dawn o' day. Oh, miss, that is a sight you'd love to see.'

Miss Anne laid her hand on the girl's arm. 'It is good for us, Loyalty, to have those feelings. "God is seen in His works. The heavens declare His glory."'

Loyalty nodded her head assentingly.

'Yes, I reckon,' she said, 'I don't know much about Un tho'—I wishes I did—I mean in that ways. Up to the chapel,' and she indicated where with her head, ''ceptin' 'tis Mr. Yabsley, they frightens 'ee so about Un, makin' out you'm allays goin' to catch it for yer bad doin's, and that if you isn't served out now, 'tis all hoarded up, and you'll get it hot after.'

'Oh dear! but that's very painful,' said Miss Anne, preparing to rest a little while by sitting on a bit of the mound; 'and very wrong, for "God is love"'—she might make her theology, she thought, lead up to her errand—'and everyone knows what love means; you know that, don't you?'

Loyalty stood with her back leaning against the higher part of the same mass of rock on which Miss Anne was seated. A nod gave her reply.

'Yes,' continued Miss Anne, 'I'm sure you must; and shall I tell you how I guessed that? Why, because I have just parted with a mother in sad distress because her son, she told me, is over head and ears in love with someone—called—Loyalty.'

While Miss Anne was speaking the colour had been gradually mounting up to the roots of Loyalty's hair, and feeling that if the lady looked at her her blushes would be ten times deeper, she had recourse to the ostrich trick of throwing her apron over her face to hide them.

'Ah! Now what is that son's name?—No? Well—what is his mother called? You won't tell me? Then I must tell *you*. Poor Mrs. Hockaday!'

The apron was down, the head turned round. 'Oh,' said Loyalty, with an unembarrassed face.

'Oh,' inwardly echoed Miss Anne, 'then there's another mother and another son; perhaps I shall bring down two birds with my one stone. Yes,' she said, seeming not to notice the sudden change in Loyalty's manner, 'I left her in great trouble: her naughty son declares he will go off to sea because he fancies you don't care for him; indeed, I think he believes you love someone else better.'

Loyalty's face flushed again, but this time it was the flush of anger.

''Tis a pity his mother should show such foolishness about him,' she said sharply; 'he'd be ever so much better gone. Good riddance o' bad rummage is what I should tell un.'

'Oh, that's unkind—cruel,' and Miss Anne looked at her reproachfully.

'Well, then, miss, he shouldn't go and talk when he swored he wouldn't do so; but I ought to ha' knowed what to expect with his blab, blab—'tis always his way.'

'No, now, you are jumping at too hasty a conclusion. He has only let his mother into the secret of his own trouble. He hasn't so much as told her the name of his rival, nor who he is, nor how he knew about him.'

'Oh.' Loyalty was at once mollified.

'You think better of him now, don't you?'

'Yes, miss,' and she hung her head abashed; 'and please I asks your pardon for speakin' out so hasty.'

Without answering, Miss Anne's eyes were fixed on the girl. Memory had turned back the pages of a score of years. Old heartsores, suspicions, jealousies, doubts, had rushed over her. It needed an effort to bring herself back to the present again.

'That's the worst o' havin' a temper,' Loyalty was saying; 'if you thinks a thing, out it comes, and then you're sorry. I'm sure I don't wish Ned harm in no way; only, what's the good for un to harass his mother, when, ever since he begun it, he knowed my answer—'t has allays been the same, and allays will be.'

'Then you're firm, Loyalty—and faithful, are you, too?'

Loyalty smiled, as if proudly conscious of that virtue.

'And yet,' continued Miss Anne, 'they give you the character of being a sad coquette.'

'In my ways, p'r'aps—not in my heart; that's set like this rock, it's so steady.'

'Well, then, I hope it's fixed on somebody good,' said wily Miss Anne.

'Good!' exclaimed Loyalty, 'that isn't the name for un; he's——' But all imagery seeming unworthy of comparison, she ended by, 'Well, there ain't no one in the whole world not his equal.'

The slightly flushed face and animated, proud bearing sent through Miss Anne a shiver. It was as if the past was speaking—often had she caught a look, been struck with the resemblance of a feature, but never had the certainty been so incontestably forced upon her as now.

'And I hope he loves you in return, Loyalty?'

The lovely face was clouded.

'Oh, that wudn't be at all likely, miss;' and there was a minute's hesitation—'see who I be.'

To Loyalty's amazement and embarrassment, Miss Anne suddenly burst into tears. 'Oh my, miss; don't!—whatever shall I do?' for the sympathy Loyalty would have professed to anyone else she felt, in Miss Anne's case, would be a liberty.

'Nothing, Loyalty, nothing.' Miss Anne was quickly wiping her eyes. 'You see, it is as I told you; I laugh, and then I cry; very foolish, isn't it—as we both know.'

In her anxiety and fright, Loyalty had thrown

herself down on the ground beside Miss Anne, and there, looking at her with eager interest, she remained. The beautiful face was quite near; over her uncovered head her chestnut hair rippled in short, thick curls; her eyes—wondrous eyes—so like to those which, twenty years before, had stolen Anne Hamlyn's love—were fixed on Anne Hamlyn's face.

Again the roll of time went back; in the garden under the old elms Anne and her lover walked together; bending gently forward, Anne's lips all but touched Loyalty's rosy mouth—then, starting back, she put her hand quickly up; the name—his name—Carleton, had nearly escaped her.

CHAPTER XXII

CARLETON HAMLYN had been very much in his cousin Anne's mind that day. She had had a letter from him—no unusual event, for they had always kept up a friendly, as well as a business correspondence with each other; and during Anne's recent stay from home, it had happened that they had paid more than one visit to houses at the same time.

Since the death-blow struck at Trafalgar, by Nelson, to the foreign naval powers, Captain Hamlyn, who had then lost an arm, had not been on active service. He had indulged in the fancy that his health was not good—had travelled a little for its benefit; and, coming at length to the conclusion

that off his favourite element he was very much like a fish out of water, he had lately started a small yacht, so that when tired of shore he could get a few days at sea. During the last year or so his restlessness had terribly increased, and since he and Anne had last met, the yearning to settle down in a house, his own house, with—well, it was of no use disguising it, for no other woman would ever be his wife—Anne at his side, was growing stronger every day.

Relations, friends, people who met them, were tired of speculating why they did not marry, and whether there was or there was not any tie between them. Each spoke of the other with the deepest interest and affection; when they met it was as dear friends, old companions. Together they seemed thoroughly happy, but it went no farther; those who watched could not follow them after they had parted, nor hear each sigh—he: 'Did she but know!' —she: 'If he would but tell me!'

Past peculiarities in Captain Hamlyn's conduct, coupled with his self-banishment from his home and property, were set down to certain eccentricities connected with what people referred to as 'that lamentable event,' when it was believed that for a time 'he went off his head a little.' Had he not done so, surely there was no occasion for the excitement and despondency he betrayed. There were officers afloat in that day who had hanged half a ship's company, and were on as good terms with themselves as those who knew them were.

The fear these friends who interested themselves so much had, was that there might be a tendency to a recurrence of a similar kind, and if so, that would quite account for his avoiding scenes likely to excite an irritable brain; and also, Anne being his cousin, for his not marrying her. It was very sad for her, very sad for them both; and with this verdict the discussion of them usually came to an end.

Many a man might have inferred, from things Anne Hamlyn said and wrote, that she was inviting that a better understanding should be established between them; but not Carleton—he knew her too well. Not a word of anger, explanation, or dismissal had ever passed between them, but both knew there had sprung up a wall of partition through which no word of love had ever filtered. The state was a false one, begun in bygone days, when each saw some reason for keeping silent. It had gradually gone on at first through long separations, warfare, hurried meetings, false delicacy—oh, a thousand excuses had put each off from speaking—but Anne knew that before that tragedy which had darkened so many lives had taken place, a suspicion had been awakened in her, and of that suspicion Carleton was aware; after-events had made this doubt so terrible, that when no explanation came, strive as she did, she could not hold him clear.

Proud as she was high-minded, Anne felt it was not for her to seek to sift this mystery. To hold her cousin blameless was impossible; no one on

earth save their two selves knew the exact peculiarities of their position. Though all the world should turn from Carleton, Anne knew that to the end of time her love for him would remain. Yet though she could marry a man who had committed even a crime, she would never call him husband who withheld from her a secret which she had a right to know.

Suddenly, to-day, by some unseen agency which seemed inscrutable, this secret, guessed at so long, became for Anne Hamlyn a certainty—to doubt that the father of Loyalty George was her cousin Carleton was impossible. The key-note rightly struck, each incident and event fitted itself into perfect order; and though, to Loyalty, the lady she was watching had seemed to sit but for a few minutes silent, when Anne rose up, her face turned towards home, she inwardly felt herself to be a different woman.

'I think it best for you not to go to Mrs. Hockaday's, Loyalty; but I should like you to walk a little way back with me; will you?'

Loyalty, who had already sprung to her feet, did not answer.

'You don't mind?' said Miss Anne, uncertain whether her silence might not be hesitation.

'Mind!' and Loyalty gave a rippling chuckle; 'why, miss, I'd walk the world over after 'ee, if you'd have me! 'Cos o' what happened and that,' and a peculiar jerk of her head instructed Miss Anne

as to what she alluded, 'grandfer won't suffer the name o' Hamlyn to be so much as uttered; but he durstn't never say nothin' agen *you*, or I flies at un like a tiger; he knows better than to try and maul me now'—and she surveyed her splendidly-developed arms with satisfaction—'and oaths and cusses don't hurt; I's got used to they.'

'And yet, Loyalty, I have never done anything to deserve this gratitude from you. What made you feel it? Can you tell me?' Anne's heart beat fast as she put the question.

'Well, I reckon 'twas Roger—Roger Coode—as first put the question into my head.'

The curiosity of Miss Anne's sidelong glance was satisfied by the deepened blush which, speaking that name, spread over Loyalty's cheeks.

'He showed me the blue handkercher you gived to un, and when it was wored out, he gived un to me.'

'Well?'

'Well, then you comed to speak to me yourself, miss, and 'twas ever so much better than talkin' to other folks was.'

'How?'

Loyalty hesitated.

'Oh, 'cos I went off feelin' like other maidens does, and not with murder in my heart, which most of 'em makes me feel.' Then, fearing some apology was needed for the mention of such wickedness, Loyalty added, 'Don't 'ee be hard on me, Miss

Anne. You donno' what 'tis to be looked down 'pon and smeared at, like I've bin—when you're hounded off as not bein' fit company for no one, oh! then them as speaks a kind word to 'ee you worships, and longs to lay your life down for 'em. That's how I do to two I knows by,' and the lovely eyes were turned towards Miss Anne, who instinctively had laid her hand on Loyalty's shoulder.

'And am I one of those two, Loyalty?' A nod was her reply. 'And the other—who is the other one—tell me?'

Embarrassed, Loyalty's eyes sought the ground, but only for a minute; the next her head was raised, and with a little shake of it, half proud, half defiant, she said, 'I reckons, miss, you knows.'

'Well, yes, perhaps I can guess. Roger, is it?'

The dimpled curves came out around the drooping mouth as Loyalty said, with a tremor, 'Most about here guesses 'tis he, but I don't mind, I bain't ashamed,' and she drew herself up erect, 'to own I dotes on every inch o' ground he trods on.'

Miss Anne smiled, but it was in sympathy. It did not offend the young girl.

'And Roger—does he guess this, Loyalty?'

But Loyalty would have died rather than betray Roger.

'Oh, I dessay if he gived hisself the trouble to think he might, only men and maidens is so different there; they's got hordes o' things to set their minds 'pon—not that if he hadn't 't 'ud be likely he'd set

his 'pon me. Look how they'm thought of and held up by everybody!—and Mrs. Coode can't abide me; us is poison one to the other, her and me.'

Miss Anne did not answer, and Loyalty not presuming to volunteer more personal information, the two walked for a little way in silence. Suddenly, in connection with what she was thinking of—for Anne's thoughts were working rapidly—she said:

'Did your grandfather ever give you any reason why he felt such hatred to all who bore the name of Hamlyn?'

'No, 'ceptin' 'tis to wish evil to 'em, and hope he may meet 'em down somewheres below;' and Loyalty's eyes indicated a depth the name of which she spared Miss Anne. 'He don't hardly ever speak of 'em now, and that's the Cap'en, miss—he don't mean you; but no one 'ull ever turn him to think different of the Cap'en—he holds to it that 'twas he set the press-gang on the poor soul.'

Anne uttered a sharp cry of agony.

'No, no—impossible he could—it couldn't be!' and she held up her hand as if to keep back any further revelation.

'Most like not, miss,' cried Loyalty, embarrassed beyond measure that she had called forth so much agitation. 'Grandfer's got it into his head by broodin' over it all so. I oughtn't to have told 'ee,' she added vexedly, 'and I shouldn't neither, only I wanted to account for the way he goes on.'

'Loyalty'—and Miss Anne took the girl's hand,

holding it in hers while she looked at her fixedly—'on the contrary, I beg, and beg of you most earnestly, to tell me everything you can remember,—what your grandfather has told you, what you have heard him say, and how you feel and think yourself on the matter; and this out of no idle curiosity, my poor girl, but the wish to befriend you. You know'—and she made an effort, as though the words would not come out but with difficulty—'that *that* has always been Captain Hamlyn's desire. You have been told so, have you not?'

'Yes.'

'By your grandfather—has he told you so?'

'Yes.'

'How? Tell me, what has he said to you?'

'That he'd rather rot on a dung-heap than take a pin's point from un.' Miss Anne bent her head, as if deploring this resolution. 'And as for me, if he catched me having aught to do with any of the name, he'd wring me neck, and pitch me headlong over cliff.' Miss Anne's face showed the pain she felt. 'But I pays no heed to talk like that,' added Loyalty reassuringly; 'not now I don't. What should I be about to suffer un to do it? If they rouses me I can put forth the strength of a lion, and fear's a word as has no meanin' for me—grandfer knows that, and so does the others of 'em too—they dursn't offer me no affront, or I'd knock 'em over like ninepins.'

'Oh, my dear child,' said Miss Anne, 'I don't like to hear you talk like that.'

'Don't 'ee, miss?' said Loyalty, puzzled. 'I thought, p'r'aps, you'd be glad to find I could take my own part; 'twould be a poor job if I couldn't, seein' the crew I'm forced to live among.'

'It isn't the life you would choose, Loyalty?'

The girl shook her head.

''Tis the only one most like I shall ever know,' she said sorrowfully. 'What's the use of tryin' to make-believe otherways? The brightest man that ever trod in shoe-leather would be dragged down by matin' hisself with such as me. Where could 'ee go that folks' tongues didn't follow 'ee?—"Look to she, her father was hung!" 'Twouldn't be different then to now. I've heer'd that in Plymouth streets—'pon the Hoe, to Dock, to Mount Wise—the same tale; and then'—she was trying to choke back her rising sobs—'I'm called brassy and bold, 'cos I looks 'em in the face and gives 'em back their own. Only God, Miss Anne, if He lowers Hisself to look 'pon such a heart as mine, sees how their words, like knives, go stickin' in.'

The tears were running down Anne's cheeks.

'It's late in the day, Loyalty, but if I'm spared, justice shall yet be done you.'

'Oh, as for that, miss, I dessay if I'd been brought up as they have, I should do as they do.'

'No, I don't believe so, your nature is far too noble.'

Loyalty shook her head incredulously.

'Oh, I don't know about its nobleness, Miss Anne; 'tis a terrible hard one to keep within bounds. I

fancies sometimes if I'd had a mother to look after me, I mightn't have turned out such a reglar bad one.'

'Does your grandfather ever speak of your mother to you?' asked Miss Anne.

'Never; but for all that, I know he doted 'pon her, and that's the best thing about th' ole man—his love for she. Did you know mother at all, Miss Anne? Can 'ee call her to mind in any ways? What was her like in looks?—was her like me?'

Loyalty's voice had dropped to a lower tone, she put her questions timidly, pleadingly.

'I perfectly remember her. No, Loyalty, she was not very like you.'

'So I feared.'

'From what?'

'Oh, things as grandfer has said and throwed up to me. 'Tis all very well for he to cant and rave agen the Cap'en, and hold un as a murderer and that, but he hated poor father hisself; and if ever I've done a thing to anger him and rouse his temper, you should hear 'im go on about 'im—'twould turn yer blood cold, miss, as it's done mine; and it's set me agenst grandfer more than all else he's done to me, miss, so that I've had it in my head to start off and leave un all alones by hisself—only,' she added hastily, 'of course, 'tisn't what I should ever carry out, seein' that he's gettin' up in years, and depends for most things on my doin' it.'

Miss Anne made no comment on 'old George's' inconsistency. They had reached half-way down

the precipitous lane which would land them at the point in the village from near which Anne had started.

Standing back on a small space of level ground, a rickety, tumble-down farmhouse stood, with barns and pigsties clustered close around, and an ill-kept yard, whose evil odour held its own against the perfume sent out by the tangle of honeysuckle, clematis, and late roses by which the windows were enshrouded. Orchards of stunted, dwarfed apple-trees stretched down to the ravine below, where their growth became better shaped and larger from the shelter afforded by the opposite cliff, which, climbed over, brought you again in face of the sea.

'I think, Loyalty, that here I shall say good-bye to you,' said Miss Anne, coming to a sudden stand-still. 'I've brought you further back than I intended, and fear you will be very tired when you get home—you've a long distance round to go.'

'Oh, I shan't go round, miss'; and answering Anne's look of inquiry, she added, 'My way 'll be to cut down 'cross the orchard there, and up over cliff side, and on.'

'But there's no path?'

'There's path enough for me. I've done it many's the time on a night pitch dark and no moon.'

'Do the Chubbs know you, then, Loyalty?'

'I reckon if you asked 'em they'd say no; but 'tis surprisin' 'mong the folks as knows 'ee at night, how short-memoried they be by day.'

Rumours she had heard from time to time supplied

Anne with the probable solution of this mystery. It was known that many of the neighbouring farmers were anything but adverse towards the illicit traders. Whispers had gone abroad about carts being seen, horses being lent, and different services rendered, for which payment was made in excellent tobacco, and spirits not to be bought for money.

Loyalty had been trained to do the bidding of this lawless gang; evidently she was familiar with their dishonest chicanery. A shudder ran through Anne as she recalled stories she had heard, reckless scenes of coarse revelry, in which to picture this girl, so near to her in blood, gave her agony. Educated by a father who had been brought up in the days when children were made to drink their Sovereign's health on bended knee, Anne regarded the King's laws as only second to the commandments of God, and those who broke them only in that degree less guilty. The scheme which had been so readily and firmly weaving itself in her mind seemed suddenly Utopian, chimerical. To cage this wild nature and hedge her in with the restraints of domestic life and conventionality, would be much the same as entrapping a sea-bird and setting it down to live in a poultry-yard.

Anne heaved a sigh which seemed to come from the lowest depths of her heart.

'You ain't angered with me, Miss Anne? I haven't said nothin', have I, to hurt 'ee?'

'No, Loyalty—why?'

'Oh, because '—she was hesitating over her reply—'sometimes, after me and Roger's had a talk together, 'twill end so as if, all of a suddent, somethin' rose up to shove us off one from the other, and he'll draw hisself away, and for why I've never been able to find a meanin'.'

'And most likely he could not give you one. Love is very changeable, Loyalty; it shifts from point to point like the wind.'

Loyalty smiled in token of the comfort these words gave her.

'And *you knows*, don't 'ee, Miss Anne? You've felt the pangs o' love yerself, haven't 'ee?'

'Well, yes, Loyalty;' and the delicate pink which stole over Anne's cheeks made her look only a little less youthful than Loyalty herself. 'I fancy there are few of us who, at some time or other, have not experienced its joys and sorrows—but come, come, we must not enter upon any fresh subject of discussion; it is far later now than I had intended it to be, and we have both some distance to go. Good-bye;' and adding to her farewell some directions as to their next meeting, Anne picked her steps through the never-dry quagmire which marked the entrance to the farm, and hastened on her way.

At the top of the hill which rises from the slip near The Swan her pony-carriage was waiting. She got in and drove home in silence, occupied by the tumult of thought which had taken possession of her.

Arrived at the house, she was forced to listen to

the chiding which Miss Yolland—a distant relative who lived with her as companion, and was supposed to relieve Anne of the cares of housekeeping—felt it incumbent to give her. Miss Yolland, belonging to a generation older, still regarded Anne as a youthful, irresponsible being, oblivious of chills which would produce inflammations and rheumatism, and obstinate about changing her stockings when, beyond a doubt, she had damp feet.

Anne, usually patient and sweet-tempered, made an effort not to seem irritable, and chided herself—having made her escape—on the unreasonableness of her impatience. There was a miniature which, the night before, accident had seemed to throw in her way. Arranging and sorting out the contents of a cabinet which had long needed putting in order, she came upon a likeness of Carleton Hamlyn when a boy. Anne had pounced upon the portrait as a treasure, had feasted on its good looks, and had carried it off to her own room, so that she might examine it at her leisure, and compare it with two other portraits of a later date.

Unknowingly this likeness was to prove the detective by whose agency the guessed-at mystery of so many years became a certainty. The similarity between the two faces at nearly the same age made further doubt an impossibility. Standing with the portrait in her hand, Anne went over the features separately, each lineament serving as a separate nail to fasten more firmly her conviction.

In the morning she had covered her newly-found possession with kisses; now, after regarding it sadly, tearfully, she restored it to the drawer out of which it had been taken, locked it away, and sat down.

The evil to be remedied was the long neglect of Loyalty; to endeavour to secure for the injured girl some measure of happiness, Anne felt must be her first care. If Roger did but reciprocate in any degree Loyalty's love, and could be brought to think seriously of her, her future would be safe. Anne could not desire for her a better protector. And after the fashion of women she thereupon began to weave a little scheme by which, under pretence of seeking advice from Roger, she might introduce Loyalty's name, and try to find out the real state of his feelings towards her. In the letter received from Captain Hamlyn he complained of the great difficulty he had in meeting with a smart, clever sailor-man, whom he could trust to look after his little vessel when he was away, and feel not quite alone with when they were on board together—could Anne help him?

In pursuit of her present object, Anne meant to try; and without naming her reason for so doing, she wrote a little note to Roger, asking him to come to the house the following day, as there was something she wished him to advise her upon.

CHAPTER XXIII

'WELL, I'm sure,' said Mrs. Coode, to whom Roger had just read the contents of Miss Anne's note; 'I wonder whatever she can want of you? "Somethin',"' she quoted proudly, '"she thinks you could advise her upon!" Oh, my dear, what a prospect lies before you!—openin's made at every turn. It all rests with you, Roger; only recollect that a time in life comes when luck calls "Now or never" to everybody.'

Roger smiled as he nodded his head in assent. The long talk, the night's rest, had soothed and invigorated both of them. Mrs. Coode's hopes were rising as she recognised the beneficial alteration in her son.

The depression of his late orgie having passed off, Roger felt himself in a fit state to face his situation; and, as was his wont, he summoned his one self to appear at the tribunal of his other self, there to plead his cause and have sentence passed upon him. But this inquiry must take place when he was sure of solitude, had safe from interruption; therefore he settled to hold it as he went to keep his appointment with Miss Anne. Many roads lead to Ferrers House, and the one across the cliffs that Roger chose was the least frequented and most circuitous. True, pedestrians from Plymouth came by this way, but there being no actual road or path, it was easy,

among the thick clumps of gorse, projections of rock, and tall bracken, to hide your approach, or take a higher turn.

'I shall get ready the old boat, mother, and go out for a bit of a row. 'Tis a capital thing when you seem to be any ways adrift in your bearin's.'

'Why not borrow Mr. Jenkins's?'—Mrs. Coode sympathized most heartily with Roger's restorative—'I'm sure you'd be as welcome to it as the flowers o' May.'

'Oh, our old tub is right enough for me. I was only castin' my eye on her this mornin'. Overhauled a bit, and a fresh coat o' paint on her, she's good for many a year to come.'

The tone in which Roger spoke of the boat might have been used for a living thing, and he almost felt it so to be. The boat to a dweller by the sea is as the horse to the inland dweller, a thing to be proud of, and take thought and care for.

''Tis them vagabond boys does the mischief,' said Mrs. Coode, 'tyin' her up so that she's left bangin' against the wall, or else flingin' in great stones to her bottom. I only wish I could catch 'em at it, young raskils! I don't know what they'm comin' to in the present day. I never heard tell of such boys as there is now.'

Roger smiled.

'Oh, I expect we was tarred with pretty much the same brush when I was a youngster.'

'No, that you wasn't,' said his mother decidedly;

'a better boy never drew breath than you was. If you hadn't been, I'd have cut 'ee within an inch of your life but I'd have made 'ee so, but there wasn't no need for that.'

'I'm afraid you spoilt me, mother.'

'Not I; and I defy anyone livin' to say so. If I'd got fifty boys to bring up, I'd bring 'em up the same, and hope they'd repay me as well as you've done, Roger.'

Roger did not reply, but he did what for him was a rare thing—he went over and kissed his mother, and there was a minute or so of silence between them.

'Then 'til you see me again you know where I am. When I think 'tis time to, I shall go on to Miss Anne.'

'Oh yes, do!'—Mrs. Coode's tone was made eager by her effort at self-control—'I'm longin' to hear what 'tis she wants you for.'

'Somethin' kind to somebody, I'll bet a wager.'

'Oh, no fear that you'll ever find her lackin' on that score, 'tis——' But the remembrance of yesterday's meeting checked Mrs. Coode, and she drew back the severe rider she was about to add, substituting, 'Humanly speakin', I've always been very partial to Miss Anne.'

Roger crossed the narrow road, and went down the slip of garden, at the bottom of which the water —neither river, nor lake, nor sea, but a mixture of all three—ran. To the steps, rough-hewn out of the natural rock, the boat was moored; it was high tide,

and Roger could row easily along the whole way through the tortuous windings to the open sea.

Only those who are familiar with these shut-in, hidden-away villages can fully realize the peculiar beauty of their surroundings. White cottages smothered in myrtles and roses, homesteads hidden by orchards, ivy-clad churches guarded by venerable yews and hollies. And facing these the green-clad slopes, whose trees bend down and are reflected below in a mirror of clear water, out from which you pass into bold bluffs, high cliffs, and the boundless space of the restless sea.

Through this fair scene Roger had come, its charms heightened in his mind by comparison with the foreign climes amid which the last three years of his life had been spent. Like many a strong-willed man, he was eminently emotional, quickly touched through every sense, his pulses answering and vibrating more readily than his usually calm exterior would have led anyone to suspect; and one of the many tasks Roger had set himself was the regulation of this ill-balanced susceptibility, which too often opened the flood-gates of anger and of love.

The opal sky of a September afternoon, the clouds of which, fleecy and white, were massed together and lay low, spread above river and sea. Within the land-locked harbour not a breath of wind ruffled a leaf. The sun shone warm, but not with the hot fierceness of summer heat. The velvety brown moss and golden ferns made great patches up the sides

of the cliffs which Rǒger was passing. Out from between these two guardians of the river's mouth he would soon emerge, to come in sight of the Mew Stone, the Shag Rock, the bold coast, the undulating slopes which make the glory of Plymouth Sound. No breakwater protected it in that day, and Torbay, although so exposed that Lord Howe had declared it would prove to be the grave of the British Fleet, was deemed a safer haven.

The south-west wind, not felt before, when once beyond the lee of Worsewell, set the boat in motion. The short rocking movement was not in harmony with reflection and self-examination, so that Roger determined to row in shore and land. Time and a little distance more or less being of no object to him, he could as well reach Ferrers House from that point as any other.

In passing he scanned the broken rocks and beetling crags familiar and dear to his boyhood. He saw the very spot where his life had been given back by her who was now clamouring to take possession of his heart, and he closed his eyes as if to shut out the memory of any past claim.

Ferrers Bay, which at a distance looks inviting and of easy access—by reason of the sudden dip of land, which gives a background of sloping fields, in this autumn time yellow with the stubble of late-grown corn—is a landing-place which needs much seaman-like skill, and Roger, familiar with each rock and reef, felt an inward pride in the skill by which

the boat was brought sharp round so as to hit a point where the surf would carry her high up the beach. The tide had left a circling fence of seaweed visible, beyond which he might leave the boat safely moored. This done, he clambered up past the mill, crossing its blackened water-shoot, and, going through the swing gate, skirted the wall of the little churchyard, which lies so close down by the sea that its waves sing the dirge of the dead who rest in it.

Roger paused; he was passing a hay-rick whose shelter seemed to invite him—but no, far better to mount the slope and get up above, the air there was fresher, and he would be nearer the House when he judged it time to keep his appointment.

A little critical in his choice of a resting-place, he wandered along further than he intended. At length a spot with every requirement seemed to present itself, and he was about to stretch himself down, when a rustle on the other side of the clump of blackberry-bushes attracted his attention. Half raising himself he looked over, and was startled and confused to see Loyalty. She, anxious for another talk with Miss Anne, was lingering about in the hope of perhaps seeing the lady.

There was a moment of embarrassed silence, broken by Loyalty saying:

'Oh, it's you there, is it?'

'Yes, it's me; is that so very extr'ordinary?'

'I don't know,' and she gave a little hard laugh; 'I know I didn't expect to see ye.'

'I comed up here to sit quiet and ruminate a bit,' said Roger loftily.

'All right, I shan't disturb 'ee; I can as well go further along. I s'pose the clift's big enough for the both o' you and me;' and she jumped up as if to take her departure.

'Here, avast there,' said Roger, somewhat disconcerted by her manner. 'You and me had best have a few words together, Loyalty—about that night,' he added, answering her look of inquiry.

'Oh, that night, is it? Well?'

Roger was nettled by her indifferent manner. These, then, were the airs she meant to give herself, thinking she was secure of him.

'Well, I want to hear what 'tis you hold me to,' he said roughly.

'Hold you to!' and her laugh sounded in his ears discordantly; 'why, I hold you to have been as drunk as any fiddler.'

Roger's face grew scarlet, all over his tanned neck and throat you could see the rush of colour come.

'Oh! is that all that's restin' in your mind?'

'Lors no; but I 'spects that's as much as you'll care to listen to. If not, I can give 'ee back the language you used, the oaths you swore, the bets you had to fight every man-Jack amongst 'em—and the blows you dealt, and the black eyes you gived, and the many it took to keep 'ee back from doin' murder. What did 'ee think, then?' she said, in-

furiated by seeing what he *had* expected of her; 'did you look to hear me boastin' that I'd had offered me the love of a man gone in liquor? I gets that chance every day—*there*, you'm only one fool among many. I can always stoop and pick up as good as what you offered me then; but what I *did* think was, that I'd set my fancy on somebody above, higher than the crew I lives among, and I find I was mistook. Good-day, Roger Coode. The next time you goes sweetheartin', not bein' sober, better luck to you.'

She had already turned to go, but Roger sprung after her.

'Loyalty,' he cried, 'it isn't you speakin' like this to me—you are actin' a part—puttin' it on. I see through you—I see what you think.'

In the sudden revulsion he felt, Roger actually believed that it had been his wish to remain true, and that Loyalty was mistaken in reproaching him.

'What do I think?' she said fiercely.

'That what I said that night 'bout your bein' my promised wife I don't, now I'm sober, mean to stick to.'

'No more you don't.'

'I call God to witness, if you'll have me, I'll marry you.'

'I don't ask ye to marry me!' she said passionately. 'I asks ye to give me your love. Can you do that? If so, I'd go the world over after you; but if not, if every bit o' your heart ain't mine, then you've got

my leave to pitch me over yonder cliff there, but not to measure my finger for a weddin'-ring.'

'Loyalty!—and you can still doubt me—what makes you mistrust me so?'

'The poor bruised, bleeding thing I carries here,' she said, pressing her hand against her heart as she spoke; 'the heart you stuck chockful o' thorns when you let me see how low you held me, Roger.'

Roger was about to protest, but she continued: 'That you should ever think I'd keep 'ee bound to what you didn't mean to say! Ah! 'tis true; where love's concerned, the two furthermost ends o' the poles ain't wider apart than men and maidens be.'

Touched by her voice, her manner, and the nobility of her nature, Roger tried to clasp her in his arms.

'When I came up here,' he said, 'in a measure the very worst that you thought was true. I loved you, Loyalty, with all my soul, but I was ashamed of my love—ashamed of lovin' *you*. Now, I don't see how I can ask you to join your lot with mine—now, when your eyes is opened to the mean, paltry hound you've fixed your fancy on.'

Loyalty did not speak; her drooped head still hung low, through her veins liquid fire seemed to be set running. Roger speaking like this! Roger humbling himself before her! Oh, it was a dream—a dream, from which she would most surely awaken!

'Loyalty, is it too late? Have I tried you too far?' he continued pleadingly; 'won't my love go

for nothin' with you—for you've had it all the time —strive and battle as I own I did, you'd got my heart and wouldn't let go—you're the only woman I've ever cast thought on since I was born, and what you're to me now, such you'll be to my dyin' day.'

She slowly lifted up her head.

'Loyalty?' he entreated, as her eyes met his. 'Loyalty?' and he stretched wide his arms. And with a cry of exceeding great joy she flung herself into his embrace, and there the two exchanged vows of never-ending love.

* * * * *

'By the piper,' exclaimed Roger, as, a couple of hours later, still sitting with Loyalty, he began to recollect the errand he was on, 'I promised to go and see Miss Anne. She sent down word there was somethin' she wanted to ask my advice upon. I was forgettin' all about it—for the time it had gone right clean out of my head.'

'I worships Miss Anne,' said Loyalty, heaving a happy sigh as she raised herself from where she had been reposing on Roger's shoulder.

'*Worships* her!—do you?'

'Yes, and I worships you, and everythin', and everybody,' and Loyalty lifted up to heaven her face aglow with joy; then, turning to Roger, she added, 'I feel as if I should be glad almost to know I was goin' to die—here—now—with you beside me. 'Tis as if 'twas too much—my heart's overfull. Did anythin' that ways ever come over you, Roger?'

Roger smiled indulgently.

'I know what will come over me,' he said, rising to his feet—'to be uncommonly put out if I miss seein' Miss Anne and vex her any way.'

Loyalty jumped up, fully sharing this anxiety. Roger took her hand and held it in his own until they reached a gate leading to a field on the brow of the hill, which was their point of separation. Here they bid each other good-bye—a lingering, lover-like good-bye; the pain of parting lost in the pleasure of their leave-taking.

CHAPTER XXIV

On his way, alone, Roger desired to think and plan, but his thoughts would not obey him. One idea only seemed to fix itself in his mind—that he meant to marry Loyalty, and to marry her without much delay. If, with the perplexity as to the ways and means by which this end might be accomplished, a sigh rose over the ruins of the past ambition, he quickly stifled it by the assurance that, in spite of all his mother had said, with Rowe's business went Rowe's daughter; and though a prison might be heaven with Loyalty, a palace would be hell with Phœbe. It had needed but this little touch on Loyalty's part to make the scales drop from Roger's eyes. From the evening of his return he had been forcing himself to be blind—to keep from seeing the

unselfishness, the generosity, the nobility of nature in the woman he loved. Suddenly all this was luminous before him, and, man-like, Roger's love leaped up to the height on which he had exalted her. True, he caught sight of a tangled labyrinth, at the far end of which stood his indignant, outraged mother; but to-day, even in thought, he could not enter that maze, although Hope's rosy torch lit up a forgiving face in place of the frowning shadow.

Certainly his mother must cease to object when once the indissoluble step was taken; and off flew Roger's thoughts as to the best way for him to obtain a living. To enter again on board a King's ship meant to leave his wife, for years, perhaps. Trade had suffered so greatly through the long wars, that constant employment in the merchant line was uncertain. Fishing and crabbing meant half-starvation. What was there left for him? Roger was lost in this reverie when he found himself at the gates of Ferrers House. Miss Anne was evidently awaiting him, and he had barely time to thrust his perplexities aside before he was ushered into the presence of the little lady.

Their greeting over, and Roger told to seat himself in a conveniently placed chair, Miss Anne began the conversation.

'I know I need make no excuse for asking you to come up and see me, Roger, because you have always showed me that it is a pleasure to you to be of any service to me.'

'Yes, I think you know that, miss.'

'I do. We have been stanch friends, ever since you were a little boy. And looking at you now, that seems a very long time ago.'

'Well, goin' back, it seems a bravish spell to me, miss.'

'You were such a tiny toddler when I first knew you,' and Miss Anne indicated with her hand the height of Roger from the floor, 'and rather delicate, we used to think you; then all at once you seemed to shoot up into a strong, sturdy boy. Do you remember thrashing that great big Joe Ryder, Roger?'

Roger smiled.

'Poor Joe,' he said; 'he didn't grow up into such a bad chap, neither.'

'No; far better than we thought he would. All the same, though, when your mother told me that you had given him a good drubbing, I was quite proud of you. I didn't hear of it at the time, you know'—Miss Anne was diplomatically approaching her subject—'no, not until—well, when Loyalty George saved you from falling down the Shag Rock.'

At the mention of Loyalty's name Roger felt himself growing conscious; he devoutly hoped his face would not get red and betray him.

'She's a good girl, that Loyalty,' continued Miss Anne.

'You think so, miss?'

'I feel sure of it, Roger. Unless I am much mistaken, that girl has a fine nature. She is

delicately strung, quite out of the ordinary run. I have lately had a long talk with her, and I mean to have her up here with me and see what can be done. She has been cruelly neglected, and very much misunderstood.'

Roger could not trust himself to speak, but his heart leaped up with joy. If Miss Anne took Loyalty by the hand, the battle seemed won.

'Our conversation was of rather an odd kind,' continued Miss Anne. 'I hardly think it is a secret, or if so, not one I need keep from you. That poor unfortunate Mrs. Hockaday asked me to speak to Loyalty, to intercede with her about her son.'

'Yes, miss; and did you?'

Miss Anne gave a version of the interview which we already know, toning down some parts, and enlarging very considerably on Loyalty's reticence and avoidance of any mention of the favoured rival's name.

'And didn't you have a guess, miss, at what his name was?'

'Well, yes, I did; I guessed his name was Roger.'

'And did she say you'd guessed right?'

'She didn't say I had guessed wrong; but it is a little hard, you know, Roger, for us women to acknowledge that we have bestowed our love where there is no hope of any return; and, poor child, she gave so many reasons why, if you were brought to care for her, it seemed to her impossible for you to marry her.'

Roger gave a little low laugh.

'And yet, miss, at that very time I'd asked her to be my wife.'

'You had?' said Miss Anne in amazement. 'Is that so? But it is extraordinary; because, from what she said, I was led to believe that the affection was all on her side, and that you did not even cast a second thought on her. I wonder, now, what made her wish to deceive me?'—and one heard in her tone that Miss Anne felt pained.

'She didn't want to deceive you, miss,' said Roger hastily, his bronzed face reddening, and his eyes looking down, as he added, 'I think I can give you her reasons. The truth is,' and he turned to Miss Anne with a rather sheepish expression, 'that the night before last I took a little more than was good for me, and that set my tongue runnin' rather free, and when I said what I did, she took it to be the liquor, not the love, that was speakin'.'

'And it was not so?'

'Well, no, not altogether it wasn't. I don't mean to say,' and Roger began to flounder, 'but that the one set me talkin'; still th' other was there, or if not, it wouldn't have come out.'

'And has she never suspected this before?—suspected, I mean, that you cared for her?'

'Well, miss,' said Roger, wishing to evade a direct answer to the question, 'until I came back home this time, I couldn't have said for certain whether I did or no. There was so much against it, and

mother so opposed, that whenever the thought did come to me I did my best to squelch it—'twas that sent me off to sea. I fancied a year or so of knockin' about 'ud take it out o' me, and so it did while I was away——'

'To come back with all the more force when you returned. Ah! that is generally the way, Roger. Love is a terrible deceiver.'

'I'm glad to hear you say so, miss,' said Roger earnestly. 'I'd got to feel afraid that my case was very uncommon; I'm not one of them that gives in easy, and I've had a sharp tussle. The fight's gone on night and day'—and Roger passed his hand across his brow, as though the memory of that conflict still oppressed him—'but I've had to give in; she's got too strong a hold on me. I ask you, miss, what's a man to do when he feels his life ain't worth that to him'—and he snapped his fingers together—'unless 'tis shared by her his heart's set on?'

'Why, do as you have done, Roger; ask her to share it.'

'Yes, miss, I reckon—still I shouldn't be a son if I didn't feel for mother; 'twill be a terrible cut for her, poor old soul.'

'Oh, but when she sees you happy, Roger?'

''Twon't blind her eyes to what's gone before. The old man—the doin's at The Cot'—and a shake of the head implied their character—'to say nothin' o' the father's awful end.'

'Well, but, Roger——'

'Yes, miss, but it don't do with folks of our sort, who ain't got nothin' but their good names and their decent belongin's to hold on to. 'Tain't the same as gentlefolks with us. We can't go playin' fast and loose with what's right and what's wrong.'

Roger's rough logic seemed to silence Miss Anne. For a moment she did not speak; then stretching out her hand, she said, 'Well, Roger, if it is any satisfaction to you to know that your choice has given pleasure, I can tell you that it has lifted a great weight from off me. You possibly may look at it differently; but I can never forget that through the instrumentality of my family, at the hands of one who—is very dear to me, Roger'—and the tremulous tone in which these words came made Roger feel he was being honoured by a confession—'Loyalty, that innocent child, has suffered cruelly. Well, then, for *his* sake, because I know that, if he knew, it is what he would wish of me, while I live, Loyalty shall never want a friend to help her, to stand up for her, to try by all means to soften your mother towards her. To do this, Roger, I give you my word.'

She stretched out her other hand, and Roger held the two in his broad, horny palms. He was not looking at Miss Anne; he had risen from his seat, and was standing with his head bent low—bent over another head which was lowered also. And this solemn contract entered upon, they both turned away. Then Roger picked up his hat, bade a respectful good-bye, and was going, when Miss Anne,

with a sudden recollection, exclaimed, 'Roger, stop! stop! I was entirely forgetting why I had asked you to come up.'

Roger waited.

'It was because of a letter I received from Captain Hamlyn. He has hired a little pleasure yacht—the *Racer*—from old Rowe; she is to be sent round to Brixham for him to see. He likes her description, thinks she will suit him, but he cannot meet with the sort of man he wants to put in charge of her, "a trustworthy, good sailor"; and, beyond that, someone the Captain could speak to. You see, on their little cruises they would be a good deal thrown together, because there would only be a lad to lend a hand to them. Now, do you think you know such a man?'

'I can't say I do, miss—unless you thought the Cap'en mightn't object to take me?'

'You, Roger!—but you wouldn't go, would you?'

'I would, miss, and be thankful, if you thought I should suit.'

'Why, you would be exactly the person. If I'd searched the world over, I should not have found anyone I should so much like to be with my cousin. You really mean it?—mean that I may write and tell him?'

'I shall be ever grateful to you, miss. On my way up I was turnin' it over in my mind—what I could set about doin'. I don't want to go to sea again; and all about Ferrers things is very slack now.'

'Captain Hamlyn has given up the *Skylark;* he found it a little expensive for him, and the *Racer* is quite large enough for all he wants to do at this time of year. He says he means to remain at Plymouth for the winter; I hope he will; it would be a great pleasure to me to have him so near. Who knows but it may be the first step to his returning again to his home? You must help with me, Roger, to induce him to come here and settle down.'

'With all my heart, miss, if——' and here Roger grew suddenly confused.

'If what, Roger?' asked Miss Anne, smiling. 'Come, let me hear what you were going to say.'

'If so be it meant settlin' down with you, miss.' With the fear that he might be taking a liberty, Roger's face had grown as red as a peony, but the expression on Miss Anne's face assured the young man. Sighing, she said:

'Ah, Roger! we are all anxious to shape our lives after the fashion that pleases us; but God knows what is best. When I was young, that lesson seemed very hard to me; now every year it is made easier.'

While speaking Miss Anne had risen; a nod of her head bade Roger adieu. He, having said good-day, turned away, and then turned back again.

'I know, miss,' he said hesitatingly, 'that it don't become a man in my station to give his thoughts as to one so much above him; but if anything can make it certain that there's a God and a heaven, 'tis the knowledge that on earth dwells such angels as you.'

CHAPTER XXV

WHILE Roger was with Miss Anne, Mrs. Coode was entertaining visitors.

First, Phœbe had run down, with the desire of imparting some confidences to the widow.

Her father, she said, was bent on having Roger with him. He had told her that though he should need some further parley on it, he meant to accept Mrs. Coode's offer. 'And the strange thing is,' she added, 'that somehow it's got wind abroad, and as I come down here there was several stopped me to ask about it and that.'

'Why, whatever did they say?' said Mrs. Coode, amazed.

'Oh, well,' replied Phœbe, affecting to hesitate, 'nothin' that's worth sayin' again; but people will talk, you know, though I hope you know me too well, Mrs. Coode, to think I ever gives any license to their jokin';' and she affected a consciousness which made Mrs. Coode's heart sink within her.

'It wouldn't become me nohow to go blowin' o' father's trumpet,' continued the wily Phœbe, 'and not a soul livin', givin' me my due, can ever say 't has made a difference in my behaviour towards any; but there ain't this side o' Turnchapel two buildin' yards like father's is, and if he'd only the heads to plan, he could have orders for three times the many hands he's got in his employ now.'

Mrs. Coode tried to hide her elation under a sigh. 'Yes, Phœbe, your father has crownin' mercies to be thankful for.'

'Oh, Mrs. Coode, and he sees it, too. Only last night, about Roger, he took it quite as a act of Providence his bein' throwed in his way; as he says, it ain't every young man would be so steady and sober, and have the head for figures, too—that's what takes father so. You know that when that talk was got up about me and Abednego Tregassick, father couldn't abear the thoughts of it, 'cos the business would be so throwed away; now it's all the other way on with Roger.'

Mrs. Coode's face betrayed her anxiety.

'I hope, Phœbe, your father ain't put no false ideas into your head as to what did take place between he and me. There ain't nothin' to build upon; Roger is my son, but I've yet to know what 'is veto may be.'

'Oh, I know all that, Mrs. Coode, and it ain't on my own account I'm speakin'; for if father was struck down to-morrow, I don't need nothin' more of him. He's been puttin' by for years, and of course there ain't anybody to lay a finger on it but me, to say nothin' of Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby's money, which it's natural will all fall to my share; and they'm both a deal warmer than is given credit to by many, or we shouldn't put up with the tantrums from 'em we do.'

Mrs. Coode made no answer. She was not an

avaricious woman, but any higher ambition than the possession of money was unknown to her. Among the people she lived, money was the standard of respectability. If she could but feel certain as to the disposition of her son! Roger, she was sure, had arisen in a far more hopeful humour. The clouds which yesterday had hung so low had in a measure cleared away—only the very smallest rift seemed now needed to see the sun burst out shining. All this, too, that was happening was such a distinct answer to prayer, that it appeared impossible to believe her entreaties granted only to be overthrown.

Encouraged by reviving hope, Mrs. Coode regarded Phœbe smilingly.

'I don't think you need be told that, ever since I knowed you, Phœbe, my wish has been to call you daughter-'n-law.'

Phœbe blushed furiously.

'Scores o' times,' continued Mrs. Coode, 'I've said to myself, over and over again, there wasn't in Ferrers nor Fairstoke one I'd so soon see come after me as you; and bein' Roger's mother, that's sayin' no small thing.'

'No, indeed it ain't, Mrs. Coode—only, you see—well, of course I know I ain't no beauty.'

'You're as it pleased the Almighty to make you, Phœbe!' said Mrs. Coode severely—'straight, with the full use o' your limbs, your hearin', your eyesight, and a good wholesome skin on your body; and I've got to learn if, in a wife, there's anythin'

more a man need want to look for. I call it right down sinful and presumptuous the talk that's made about looks in the present day. What meanin' is there in it—when all flesh is fashioned out o' the same potter's-clay?'

Phœbe gave a half-hearted nod of assent.

'Still, for all that,' she said, ''tis amazin' the store some men sets on good looks.'

'When you knows more about men, Phœbe, you'll better fathom the ins and outs o' their ways. Talk don't always stand for reason, any more than runnin' after maidens means marryin' em; and so some may find to their cost, one of these fine days.'

A look from Phœbe intimated to Mrs. Coode that she understood her allusion. She was about to follow with a remark, when a tap at the door announced Mrs. Yabsley.

'Oh, mercy on us!' exclaimed Mrs. Coode irritably; 'whatever's bringin' her here?'

'I thought it would never do to go past the door,' said the unwelcome visitor, seating herself in the chair which Phœbe placed for her. 'And how are you, Mrs. Coode? How do you find yourself this weather?'

'Oh, 'mongst the middlin's, thank 'ee. How are you? How is Mr. Yabsley?'

'Well, not altogether so well as I should like to see him. What with one thing and another, the cares o' the ministry is sometimes a burden too heavy for Mr. Yabsley's frail back to carry.'

'Oh, so far as that, we've most of us got our cares,' said Mrs. Coode snappishly; 'and increasin' years don't make their weight lighter. I tells Roger that what I was when he left ain't what I am that he's come back to.'

'Well, by all I hear, you ain't going to lose him again,' said Mrs. Yabsley significantly. 'Oh, I've been told,' and she gave a meaning nod at Phœbe—'wait till Mr. Yabsley comes. He'll be here presently. I told him where I was going to, and he said he should follow. Mr. Yabsley will have something to say, I can tell you, Phœbe.'

Between nervousness and excitement Phœbe giggled hysterically. Mrs. Coode preserved an ominous silence.

'Oh, here comes Tobias!' exclaimed Mrs. Yabsley.

'Then we may hope to have a little sense,' said Mrs. Coode, with severity; 'for all this head-noddin' and hints and titterin' is lost upon me. I can't make head nor tail of what you're drivin' at. Perhaps Mr. Yabsley can throw some light on the mystery?'

'Eh, what's that our dear neighbour Coode is saying?'

The worthy man was holding Phœbe by one hand, while he extended to Mrs. Coode the other. Shaking both hands together, he said: 'And what's all this I've been hearing, that your good worthy son Roger is about to rob us of our young friend Phœbe here?'

'All I can say is that you've heard more than I have,' was Mrs. Coode's stiff rejoinder. Mr. Yabsley

regarded her fixedly; then he turned his short-sighted eyes on Phœbe.

'Oh, it's no use your lookin' at me, Mr. Yabsley'—Phœbe was blushing scarlet under his scrutiny—'I don't know nothin' of what's bein' said. All I wish is people would hold their tongues; 'tis too bad the reports that gets set about of anybody.'

'Well, certainly you do surprise me,' said Mr. Yabsley, relaxing his hold. 'I never supposed that without sure foundation they would not only have given you to Roger, but made him the partner of your father. Could I have caught too readily at the report—made too much out of it? It may be so; the wish is often father to the thought; and there is no one among my flock I desire prosperity for more than for Roger. I have always thought him born to rise above his station. He has in him the making of a man who ought to climb to the top of the tree. It is a fancy of mine,' and he smiled at Mrs. Coode pleasantly, 'that I shall live to some day point to Roger and say, with pride, "I knew him, taught him, when he was a boy."'

Mrs. Coode's motherly heart grew big with gratitude to this unselfish, kindly man, over whose face a shade of disappointment had come. 'Oh dear, dear, and to think it's all false! not an iota of truth in it, you say?'

'No, now, I didn't go so far as that;' Mrs. Coode was too upright to permit herself wilfully to lead her minister into error. 'What I did say, or might

have said, was, a still tongue's mostly found inside a wise head, and a close mouth don't catch no flies; still it isn't because some is silent that they've got nothin' to tell.'

Mr. Yabsley was for mutely accepting this truism; but his wife, always confident that she could get the better meaning before him, exclaimed—

'I can see quite what Mrs. Coode's intending. There's a something, Mrs. Coode, that you'd rather not speak of to Mr. Yabsley and me. Of course it ain't what you might expect between a member and a minister, but no doubt you know your own business best.'

'In which case there can't be no cause to argue on it. I ain't afeard of Mr. Yabsley misunderstandin' me.'

'No, no, no, certainly not, Sister Coode; I grasp the matter perfectly. Mary, my dear, we've but to follow our good friend's example, keep a silent tongue in our heads, and in due time matters will shape themselves more plainly. At Mrs. Yabsley's suggestion,' he added, looking at Phœbe smilingly, 'I was going to seize an opportunity to somewhat rudely crush the blossoms of hope; under present circumstances I shall permit them to gently wither away.'

'Well, really, Tobias, I don't see why you should foist such a word as "rudely" on me, than which nothing could be further from my thoughts. What I did say was, thinking what we'd heard was true, that there was them I knew of that it would be news to; and *that* Phœbe can answer for, as well as me.'

A drawing in of her lips testified to Mrs. Coode's incredulity, exasperating Mrs. Yabsley to add, 'Tain't to be supposed, when a serious-minded, religious-disposed man offers his company to see a young female home from chapel constantly, that he's no meaning in what he does? Neither, when the question is pointedly put, who the young person was in the pew with Mrs. Yabsley, are you to fancy 'twas merely the human eye that was caught in the young Mr. Kitto by Phœbe.'

'Then I think the question put don't do much credit to the young Mr. Kitto,' retorted Mrs. Coode indignantly. 'A parcel o' skipjacks that ain't no more fitted for expoundin' the gospel than—that cat there. As a follower, I'm condemned to have to sit under such a one, and only surprised that you should give weight to this foolishness by repeatin' such a thing.'

'Oh, come, Sister Coode,' put in Mr. Yabsley, always ready with his oil; 'you mustn't judge the young folks too harshly. The Lord's lambs will play, and we've yet to learn that the Shepherd turns a frowning face on their gambols.'

'If some don't learn later on a good deal about the Shepherd that now they wilfully shuts their eyes to, I for one shall be a mistaken woman. I tell 'ee what it is, Mr. Yabsley——'

But at this point an interruption was effected by Phœbe exclaiming that she saw Roger coming. 'He must have left the boat behind somewheres,' she

said, 'for I've watched him down the slip by the Swan, and now he's coming across the Voss.'

'Then I'll go and meet him,' said Mr. Yabsley; 'I have a word for his private ear—not anything concerning any of us, but a difficulty which has arisen and I think he can advise me on.'

'I can't help smilin',' said Mrs. Coode proudly, the minister having taken his departure; 'I'm sure he ought to carry a dixonary in his head, dear fellow, for the questions he's called on to answer; 'tis Roger this, and Roger that, with everybody. He's been gone all the afternoon up with Miss Anne. First thing this mornin' a note come down, sayin' as she wanted him to advise with her. I don't know how he stands up 'gainst it all; such homage would be too much for many.'

The hope of learning what Miss Anne's business might be made Mrs. Yabsley linger. Mrs. Coode, under the impression Mr. Yabsley was coming back, stood watching at the window.

Presently Roger entered alone.

'Why, what have you done with Mr. Yabsley, Roger?' she asked, the greetings between him and her guests over.

'Oh, he's gone across. He was bound for somewhere's th' opposite side.'

'Not when he left here, I don't think; 'cos he never said good-bye to none of us.'

'That's Mr. Yabsley's absence of mind all over,' said his wife; 'if you'd asked me, I could have told

you he wasn't coming back again. Before we started he mentioned having to go and see Mrs. Hockaday. She's in such sore trouble just now,' she added, by way of an explanation ; ' it seems that Loyalty George has drove her precious son off to sea at last.'

CHAPTER XXVI

LEFT alone with his mother, Roger still remained absorbed and preoccupied, conscious of a feeling of security and calm hitherto unknown.

Again and again his thoughts returned to Loyalty —happy, exultant, as one who possesses a newly-discovered treasure, or unexpectedly finds himself the owner of some priceless gem.

Up to this time Roger had never allowed his love to have full power; he was for ever repressing it, checking it, holding it back. Now he had broken down the barriers, and opened wide the floodgates, and the effect on him was swift and salutary.

That wavering weathercock whose shilly-shallying he had so often despised had vanished—was gone—and in its place stood the real Roger, a resolute, headstrong, determined man.

If he hesitated now, it would be simply to save his mother pain. Happiness was already softening his stern nature, and stirring within him a tenderness which until now his filial love had not known.

Mrs. Coode, occupied with some household duties,

was allowing her thoughts to stray by narrow channels to those outlets of domestic details so dear and so important to the feminine mind. Her fool's paradise was built on a very frail foundation. She was lost in deciding the exact house in which it would suit best that Roger should live—how they could manage to dispose of Phœbe's father—what amount of linen she could spare to them—and how much of her china and glass it was possible for her to do without. And in the midst of this, fearing that her son must find her but poor company, she put the match to the mine by saying—

'Well, Roger, I haven't heard yet what 'twas Miss Anne was wantin' of you?'

'No, no more you have. Well, 'twas on a little concern of the Cap'en's that she was wishin' to speak to me. She can't meet with anybody to look after the little craft he's got, and it struck Miss Anne that I might know of someone.'

'Surely! 'Tis a fairish-sized vessel, they tells me.'

'Oh, but he's gived up that one. Winter-time comin' on, he thought, for the short cruises he should take, somethin' smaller would answer his purpose as well. So he's hired the *Racer* from Rowe; it's bein' sent to him round to Torbay.'

'The *Racer*! From Rowe!' exclaimed Mrs. Coode, echoing the words that lingered in her ears. 'Well, I never did! 'tis Rowe everywheres now. Whatever's said, there must be somethin' in the man, for un to get the hold on folks he does.'

But Roger meant to be proof against saying a word in blame or praise of this favourite of Fortune. He had also decided that nothing should lead him into another contest and argument with his mother; rather than that he would leave the house, not to return until the storm had blown over.

Finding her remark drew forth no response from her son, Mrs. Coode continued—

'And 'tis somebody to look after she, Miss Anne wants? Was 'ee able to name anyone to her? Who have 'ee got in your mind? There's so precious few about here that's worthy of a recommend; and I 'spects that she knew, when she asked for you to give her help.'

Roger was about to blurt out the truth when the latch was lifted, and a voice called—

'Be 'ee wantin' of a cheap bit o' fish to-day, missis?'

'Not I,' said Mrs. Coode; 'so there's no need for comin' in.'

But the intruder was already at the door, his heavy load half shifted from his shoulder.

'Now don't go to put your filty wet basket down on my floor!' screamed Mrs. Coode, seeing that it was Dunchy, and that he hadn't heard her.

The old man caught her look rather than the words, and at once commenced replacing the burden of which he had sought to ease his tired shoulders.

'Nonsense!—no, mother, you don't mean that.' Roger, grateful perhaps for the interruption, was

already at Dunchy's side. 'Here, I'll lend a hand at settin' it down. By the hoaky, it's heavy, though!' and he stood for a moment with it poised, prodigal of his young strength. 'I don't know how you manages to carry such a weight on this old bowed back o' yours;' and he patted the old fellow sympathetically.

''Tis the prospect of a empty bread barge as does it,' said Dunchy cheerfully. 'I can't tell,' he sighed, changing his voice, 'whatever's come to folks now. There don't seem nobody as wants a ferry, not to cross by. How for ever I shall pay that £4 toll is p'r'aps know'd to Old Harry; 'tain't to me.'

'Come, now, no bad language!' said Mrs. Coode sharply.

'You won't hear none, missis, from me,' and Dunchy turned a twinkling eye on Roger; 'I hope I knows better where I is. Now, then, to pick out a nice bargain for 'ee,' and he began to turn over the contents of his basket. 'What do 'ee say to sixpence, now, for that lot there?'

'Sixpence!' said Mrs. Coode, with supreme contempt—'why, the man's mazed! P'r'aps you thinks I'm rollin' in money.' And having come over to scrutinize his offer, she screamed into his ear: 'And if I was, you wouldn't find me partin' with sixpences for no such raff as there's there.'

'Yes, mother, you will,' said Roger softly; 'give it to him, poor old chap!'

'It's right down ridicklus, Roger. Poor old chap,

indeed! Drunken old deceiver—that's the character he better answers to. 'Sides which, buyin' what you don't want, and haven't a mind to, is very poor policy.'

While the mother and son were talking, Dunchy, quick to spot Roger's advocacy, was keeping up a running fire of flattery.

'I's sure o' gettin' the rids of it all, missis, if you buys the fust lot o' me. I allays says, I'd sooner have Mrs. Coode's hansel than any—it's safe to bring luck with it, come what may;' and he gave a tremendous sniff, accompanied by an upward movement of his hand to his nose, so that, as he afterwards explained to Loyalty, the old woman mightn't see how near the lie went to choking him.

'If you likes to take fourpence,' said Mrs. Coode, 'you can lay what you've took out on that dish there; but I shan't give no more.' And, irritated by Roger's remonstrance, she turned sharply to him, saying—

'Be quiet, Roger, do!—anybody 'ud think I couldn't buy a bit o' fish now. Don't you harry yourself that I ain't actin' fair; 'tis more, now, than it's worth; and that he knows, the cheatin' old vagabond.'

Dunchy clenched the bargain by putting the fish where he had been told. Mrs. Coode, whose rule was never to break into silver while you had pence by you, went to search for some coppers which she had left upstairs.

Roger seized the opportunity of slipping into the old man's hand the money he had been mulct of.

'Thank'ee kindly,' said Dunchy. 'Ain't there no good turn I could do for you?' and he pointed his thumb in the direction in which he supposed Roger's interest to lie.

'Are ye goin' down there?'—Roger was speaking into Dunchy's ear.

'Iss, sure, I can, if you wants me.'

'Would 'ee say, then, that I didn't bring the boat back, and I'm goin' round this evenin' after her—past Shag Cliff, and on that way; and us two, she and me, could row back together.'

'And so chate the ferry,' said Dunchy, delighted. 'You knows the right course, you does, to steer a chum clear o' Poverty Bay.'

'Oh, we'll make all that straight afterwards.'

'No fear. But then, is it all straight now atween you and she—like so?' and he smoothed the back of one hand with the palm of the other.

Roger nodded his head in assent.

'Yes,' he said, laughing, 'we've done with all that,' and he crossed his two first fingers together, 'for once and for ever.'

Dunchy made a quick movement round, peering up into Roger's face with a nervous, earnest scrutiny. Satisfied apparently with the expression he found, he seized the young man by his two hands.

'Swear you'll strive to make a happy woman of her.'

'I'll do my best.'

'God Almighty help 'ee, then; you've got gived

'ee one of the lovin'est hearts He ever made. Be tender in your usage of it, Roger Coode.'

Roger shook the hand that still held his own, to show that such was his intention; and Dunchy, evidently relieved, went on to say—

'Why, if a maid like that had a-tooked up with me when I was a youngster, I should be a smart man still, 'stead o' a broken-down, worthless old beach-ranger. Ah, 'tis the women that does it all.'

'What's that about women?' said Mrs. Coode from the top of the stairs.

'I's givin' your son a word o' warnin', missis, tellin' un to be careful in the choice of 'em. Females is ticklish handlin'.'

'Warnin', indeed!' and she snorted contemptuously. 'Iss, I dessay; much good there's in it from such as you. There, take yer fourpence!' and she threw the money to him. 'Now then, off you goes!'

'Yes, out with you,' said Roger, pushing Dunchy by his two shoulders in front of him. 'Stand over against the wall there, and I'll ups with your cargo o' fish.'

'I'm blamed,' chuckled the old fellow; 'but her ways must be catchin'. That's Loyalty all over, that is. Helpin' to lift, and to car'y, and, all the whiles, makin' out 'tis nothin' but fun and frolic. To think now,' he continued, while Roger arranged his load, 'that at last 't has comed to plain sailin' atween you and she. I reckon,' and he lowered his voice to a whisper, ''twas this—the elbow-crookin'

as did it. 'Tis amazin' what a tot or so more o' grog will bring out of a man, and I advised 'ee to it when you was goin'. I see you was on the fly then.'

Roger winced a little, but it was unperceived by Dunchy, who, shifting so as to settle his basket comfortably, continued—

'And the quandary her put herself in about 'ee. *To* be sure! Why, her forded over the stream. Iss, and forded it back agen too, so as to make certain you'd ha' been seed home all right.'

'What! down by Thorn Gap?'

'Down by Thorn Gap; and was dreenin' wet to the skin, too.'

Roger drew in his breath as he said something which Dunchy could not catch.

'Eh! what was that?' asked Dunchy roughly—'I didn't hear.'

There was a moment's hesitation, and then, speaking into the old fellow's ear, Roger repeated, 'Bless her!'

'Amen,' said Dunchy, 'amen, Roger;' and with a farewell nod he went his way, leaving Roger to go back into the house again, and rejoin his mother.

But Mrs. Coode was no longer where her son had left her. She was busily employed in cleaning the fish, which, she averred, 'wouldn't be worth a brass farden if left till the mornin'.' Her temper, too, was ruffled. Roger had vexed her by giving her this unnecessary trouble, as well as by making himself, as she considered, over-free with Dunchy.

Believing that she had heard the gist of Miss Anne's communication, her curiosity did not suggest that she should immediately enter again on that subject; and, a neighbour running in to ask for information from her as to the best method of dealing with a boy who had just swallowed a brass button, she yielded to the importunities that she would later on step in, and put into effect her own peculiar method of trying to shake it out, while holding him turned upside down.

Thus set free, Roger strolled off. He was not sorry to be alone, and he settled to go to the Shag Cliff and await Loyalty's coming. He was anxious to tell her of the prospects he had of being employed by Captain Hamlyn; and this bringing certain possibilities before him, he paid no heed to how far he had gone, when a servant from Ferrers House stopped him. The man was bringing a note from Miss Anne, which said, that on thinking over Roger's offer it had occurred to her that the simplest plan would be for him to take round the *Racer* to Torbay. That at Brixham, at the address which she gave him, he would find Captain Hamlyn, and then the necessary arrangements could be made between them. She added that if Roger would settle with Rowe about taking round the boat, it would save her trouble and any further delay.

No arrangement could have been more to Roger's satisfaction. He dismissed the man, telling him to say that he would at once carry out Miss Anne's

instructions; then he retraced his steps, and knowing it was too late to find Rowe at his yard, he hurried back to Greentree.

Rowe was at home. Phœbe, Roger thanked his stars, had just set out to see her two aunts before going on to chapel.

'I was lookin' for ye to step up,' said Rowe a little loftily.

'Oh, was you? You see, I couldn't well ha' done it before, 'cos, until a half an hour ago, I didn't know what was Miss Anne's wishes.'

'Miss Anne!' echoed Rowe.

'Yes, 'tis she's brought me here. I'm, by her desire, to take the *Racer* round to the Cap'en, to Torbay.'

'Oh!' said Rowe, rubbing his ill-shaven chin to conceal his disappointment; 'I thought p'r'aps 'twas on another matter, relative to a conversation which took place atween me and your mother. I'm mistook, it seems.'

'Well, yes; and to speak plain, I don't care to enter on that subject, Mr. Rowe, not just now. It's one that me and mother don't see quite in the same light together. I'm obliged to you for your good opinion of me, but, all the same, I'd rather be as I am. If things turn out as I hope they will, I'm going to enter with the Cap'en for a bit of a spell. I fancy he an' me will hit it off with one another.'

Rowe's beady eyes might have shot venom from his anger. Like his daughter, now that others

wanted Roger, he seemed to him of double value; but, true to his mean nature, which lacked the courage to express the indignation which would have been reasonable in him, he hummed and hawed a little, and then stammered out:

'Oh, well, I ain't goin' to force upon 'ee a offer that scores o' hundreds would give their necks to have made to 'em. I've said once, and I say it agen, that there's the business, and I'm willin' for you to enter on it with me. There ain't no hurry, though. You're goin' away, but I s'pose you looks to come back agen; and when you does, why, there you'll find Rowe's buildin'-yard still standin' where you left un.'

'Yes, I hope so; and thank ye, Mr. Rowe, for your goodwill to me.'

Roger was vexed with himself that he could not take the man more graciously. Without doubt, it was a splendid offer that was being made him, and the inability to accept it was perhaps at the bottom of Roger's irritability.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE hour was not late, although the sun had long sunk to rest, and the creeping shadows had swallowed up every trace of golden glory. The fading light left the land hidden in mist; the sea, shrouded and gray, was not stirred by a ripple. Not a sound to be heard; not a soul to be seen, save Loyalty,

waiting for Roger. Lost in the happiness that had come upon her so unexpectedly, she was going over the events of the afternoon, repeating those vows of love which they had exchanged with each other.

Suddenly she was encircled by two arms which folded her in their embrace.

'Roger,' she said, without turning her head.

'Oh! so you know 'tis me;' and while speaking he bent her head, so that he might kiss the lovely face. 'Have I kept you waitin' long? I didn't mean to.'

'It don't matter if so. Dunchy came down, and when he told me I set off at once.'

'I'd the mind, this time, to be here first, and should have, too, only I was met with a errant to go on for Miss Anne. What was it, do you think, that she wanted of me this afternoon?'

'I couldn't tell, no ways, whiles you'm crickin' o' my neck as you be,' she said, smiling up at him.

Roger's lips stole the smile, and then he dexterously shifted her position, so that her head nestled close under his, and made her face conveniently near.

'Well, then, and what was it that Miss Anne wanted?'

'First and foremost, to give me the lies you'd been tellin' of to her. Oh, you may open wide your eyes, but I know. How that I didn't care the snap of a finger for 'ee—and that all the love was on your side.'

Loyalty's face grew rosy red.

'Oh!' she said, with a little happy coo. 'That's all, is it? Well, and 'tis true.'

'You dare to say so!' and under pretence of giving her a shake, Roger tightened his clasp of her. 'Why, it couldn't be; it ain't in the nature of things; maidens haven't the power to granted 'em. A man worships with his whole body—like me; and they tells me—that poor mazed young Hockaday——'

'The silly!' exclaimed Loyalty contemptuously. 'I ha'n't got patience to hear tell o' the way he's goin' on. But there, 'tis the belvin' cow is allays soonest to forget her calf.'

'Ah, yes—didn't I say, that's like the women. You mus'n't expect of 'em any feelin'.'

'You don't want me to have no feelin' for he, eh—do 'ee?' she asked coaxingly.

Entranced by the beauty of her face, whose witchery had never so powerfully appealed to him before, Roger stood twirling round his finger one of the little locks of hair which strayed like tendrils over her forehead.

'Oh, I don't mind,' he said dreamily. ''Tis differ'nt with me now; somehow, I've got to fancy as how I can trust you.'

'Then you ain't jealous no more?'

What woman could ever resist putting that question to her lover, and being satisfied with a similar answer to that which Roger made?

'Oh, don't you mistake there. Where I was a

handful jealous before, I've got in me what 'ud fill a seventy-four now. 'Tis the one demon which love hasn't drove out. He's tucked up, and is sleepin' sound and comfortable, but God help the one as rouses him; there'll be a heavy reckonin' to pay.'

Loyalty smiled as if this speech of Roger's did not displease her.

'What is it, now,' she said, ''bout Miss Anne? I know 'twasn't only to tell on me that she sent for 'ee to go to the House.'

'No, that's comin'; and when you hear it, 'twill be a bit of a surprise, I fancy.' And thereon he repeated to her Miss Anne's request, and the offer he had made to her.

'And you means to stick to what you said, Roger, and enter aboard the Cap'en's vessel?'

'I should think I did! Why, look what that means to me!—constant employ, reg'lar pay, and the givin' of a home to you,' and he strained her to him passionately, 'without the leavin' of you, and havin' to go to sea. That's been the white feather that's took my courage away. Turn where I would, there's nothin' that 'ud help to wrench that pill down, and I couldn't face it nohow.' He bent into a hollow the palm of his hand, and in it rested her chin. 'To think,' he said, tilting upwards her face, 'that other eyes was gloatin', feastin' on the sight of this, and I, famished and starved, was kept away. No; 'twould be easier to have throwed my arms round you and jump'd into the sea.'

'You'd have my leave to,' she answered, her heart speaking to him through her eyes. 'I shouldn't mind—I'd rather so. Often I've pictured us two, hugged close, close, lyin' to bottom o' the water, the waves singin' as they washed us over, and the sun warmin', or the moon lightin' up where we lay.'

'And the crabs gnawin' at our toes and settlin' down into our eyes. No, my girl, no—we mean to live. Live,' he repeated exultingly, 'and love, and be as happy as the days is long.'

Loyalty heaved a deep-drawn sigh.

'What for?' he asked; 'don't that thought content you?'

'Yes; only——'

'Only what? eh?'

'Why, when you made mention of the Cap'en—as you spoke his name—a clutch seemed to catch my heart, 'cos o' grandfer,' she said in explanation. 'He's downright mad agenst un.'

For the first time since their reconciliation, one of the old black frowns passed over Roger's face.

'Oh, well, you'll soon be done with carin' for anythin' grandfer may say in praise or blame.'

'Yes; but now 'twould make him rant and rage like any untied tiger. He ain't overpleased at Ned Hockaday's goin' away. Not that he cared for Ned, but—well, they're hand and glove, grandfer and the father: and if 'twas to come out now 'bout you and me, and o' top of it that you was with the Cap'en—from night to mornin' he'd be flingin' it up at me,

swearin' and cursin', as he knows how to, 'til 'twould be more than I could bear. No, Roger, promise not to say nothin' of it to nobody—'twon't be for long—and whiles I've got to be with th' ole man, let it be peace so far as it can. Two or three times, with both our bloods up, 't has gone pretty nigh to bein' murder, I can tell 'ee.'

Roger made a noise between his teeth, showing that this arrangement vexed him.

'There's been so much backin' and fillin' already,' he said discontentedly, 'that I wanted now to put an end to it, and begin fresh, all square and above board. I know what's in the past has been my own fault, and I've despised myself for it. The manliness was gettin' reg'larly took out o' me with the shilly-shally way I went on. It's surprisin' to me, 'tis, that you could ever have looked over it, Loyalty.'

'Well, then, 'cos I have,' she pleaded, 'give way in this to me.'

'I don't see how I can. For one thing, I've already made a clean breast of it to Miss Anne.'

Loyalty gave a little rippling laugh.

'Oh, Roger, however could 'ee find the face to.'

'Come; didn't you do pretty much the same?'

'Awh, well! But then Miss Anne's a woman.'

'The more reason that she should lend her ear to me. Never you fear: Miss Anne knows how to spell love. She learnt that lesson from somebody else afore she listened to you or me.'

Loyalty nodded assentingly.

"Iss, I b'lieve; and if the Cap'en's comin' down near here now should bring 'em together, wouldn't that be a joyful day? I wonder whatever 'tis has kept 'em for so long parted asunder?'

'Oh, well, you see,' said Roger, 'gentlefolks like them don't set about their sweetheartin' same as you and me may. They've got to call in the lawyers with their jawin' tacks hauled aboard, to settle all about the property and that; and then there's the consent of the parentses—that must be gived to 'em.'

'Yes,' said Loyalty, her face lengthening, 'and that puts it into my head about your own mother, Roger. What d'ee think she'll say about me? You haven't told her, I 'spects; have 'ee?'

'Not as yet, I haven't. I'm only waitin' to go home to do it, though.'

'Poor soul! There'll be a bitter drench for her to swallow.'

'Nonsense! Stuff!' said Roger hastily, not without a twinge, though, at the pain he knew he should cause her.

'I pities her from my heart, that I does,' continued Loyalty earnestly, 'though she wouldn't never credit my doin' so. I know what the thoughts o' me must be to her,'—and she gave a quick-drawn sigh,—'and I don't make no wonders of it, neither, Roger,' and she looked up coyly at him; 'if ever we has a son, I should be *very* partickler who he took up with to marry, more 'specially if he was to favour his father.'

'You mischief!' said Roger, catching her to him.

'If the whole world was to gainsay you, 'twouldn't be to me the balance of a feather's weight, so as you would go on lovin' me. You must swear to do that, though, Loyalty.'

'Yes, I swear.'

'And that nothin' shall evermore come to part us two?'

'Nothin'.'

'Nor nobody?'

'Nor nobody, be they angel, man, or devil. There, will that satisfy 'ee?' and she laughed merrily. 'Can't 'ee pitch on no more for us to swear to?'

'No,' said Roger, laughing in his turn. 'I take it that'll about do; but it's only fit that we should make it all square. I'm off to-morrow mornin', you know.'

'Yes, but only for the one day.'

'Well, that depends on how the oracle works. Miss Anne seems to look on the affair as settled; and if so, I shall only have to go and report myself, and bide my orders.'

'And not come back? But you won't have no kit with 'ee.'

'Oh, that'll soon be set straight. 'Sides, if this talk about takin' up his quarters at Plymouth turns out true, why, when I'm there I shall be home, as you may say; nothin' more than a walk between.'

'And every day I could come up here and wait for 'ee, on the chance; and if you was sailin', us might signal one to the other, in goin' by.'

The plan was such a happy one that they began at once to exchange ideas as to the signals to be made; and being at that blissful stage when every discussion is subject to great interruption, they were surprised to find that the clock had struck ten. Roger, while still detaining her, reproached himself for keeping Loyalty out so late, salving his conscience by assuring her he did not mean that it should happen again. She, wholly indifferent to the lateness of the hour, only entreated him not to insist on accompanying her home. The idea of going to fetch the boat was early abandoned, in consequence of Roger's delay; and the two now took their way back to Ferrers. Up to a spot agreed on they both went together, and then 'good-bye' was said. 'Good-bye'—'Good-bye.'

The word was still ringing in Roger's ears, his throbbing pulses echoing the same, as he stood steadying himself before going into the house to face his mother. But Mrs. Coode had already retired to bed. Violent opposition from the heels of the button-swallower had led to upholding the wisdom of Solomon by the administration of a good sound whipping.

'Which I b'lieve has made my own arms ache more than it's warmed his hide,' she remarked, as she took her way home; and then she began to wonder what had become of her son Roger, and was told that he had been seen going into Greentree an hour since or more. Her heart leaped for joy.

One thing only could have taken Roger there; he had decided to accept Mr. Rowe's offer.

She set the supper ready for him, took what little she needed for herself, and then went up to bed, soon to fall asleep, soothed by happy dreams. She saw herself in that Elysium of old age, by the fireside of her son, his sturdy children clustered round her knees.

Two or three times she awoke, but feeling no anxiety, she did not disturb herself to even look at the time. At length the sound of someone speaking startled her. She jumped up.

'Yes? Eh? What? Is that you, Roger?'

'All right, mother, don't rouse up; 'tis too early for you. I didn't like goin', though, without sayin' a word, and you was abed when I got home. I'm off to Torbay; I'm takin' the *Racer* round.'

'*Racer!*' exclaimed Mrs. Coode, only half-awake, 'what *Racer?* Stop, Roger, do.'

'Can't! I'm late as it is—Rowe's boat, that I told you was hired by the Cap'en. I'm off now; good-bye. If I ain't back by to-morrow, or for a day or two, you knows the reason why.'

'I don't know nothin' of the kind,' said Mrs. Coode pettishly. 'How I do hate for anybody to go flyin' off this way;' but hearing by the slam of the house door that Roger was no longer in hearing, she changed her tone. 'I can't make no sense out o' this *Racer*, and Roger goin' with her to Torbay. I reckon 'tis some fad 'tween Miss Anne and the Cap'en.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

CARLETON HAMLYN, to whom Roger Coode was going, was at this time some years over forty, singularly young-looking and handsome.

Roger, from the time he was a boy, having always heard Captain Hamlyn spoken of as 'the Captain,' had pictured a gray, perhaps bald, middle-aged naval officer; instead of which he found a man so very much the reverse of elderly, that it seemed to him he was but little older than himself. Something in his face more than usually attracted Roger, and a cheery frank manner completed the charm.

Nothing could have been more satisfactory than their interview. The *Racer* was all that she had been described. Roger was the very man that Captain Hamlyn was looking for. He was immensely indebted, he said, to his cousin Anne, the more so as he was leaving Brixham that day to join some friends at Teignmouth, to which place he told Roger to follow him. Sailor-like, it never entered Captain Hamlyn's head to consider whether Roger had come prepared to remain or not; and, in equally happy-go-lucky sailor fashion, Roger had taken it for granted that something or somebody would turn up to take word home that his small kit was to be sent after him.

Nearly a month had passed since that time, and though, through Rozzy Ryder joining—Rozzy was

younger brother to the vanquished Joe—Roger had received his necessary supplies, he had not held any other communications with those he had left behind.

In these days of penny postage and sixpenny telegrams, when the thirst for news is kept up at fever heat, it seems incredible how short is the time since husbands and wives, parents and children, lovers and friends, were separated for years often without a word of communication.

In the present case the silence maintained in no way seemed strange to Roger. His mother knew what had become of him, and that he was all right, therefore there was nothing to write about to her. And though his heart strongly urged him to send a letter to Loyalty, he suppressed the desire, knowing she would have to ask someone to read it to her.

Naturally he felt some anxiety to know how matters had gone, what was thought of his refusal of Rowe's offer, how his mother took the matter, and whether his keeping company with Loyalty had got to be known. That his mother would suspect he felt sure, and that she would be grievously pained and disappointed was as certain; still he had great confidence in her love, and fully believed that in spite of her ambition she would in the end forgive him if he proved to be a happier and better, though a less prosperous man. But prosperity was not done with for ever. There were other means for getting on in life besides joining Lucas Rowe; and if such an old curmudgeon as he could turn a penny-piece

into a pile, surely Roger might hope to do something of the same kind. In the leisure that much idle time left him, his thoughts turned over many schemes, and he was more than ever anxious that they should get to Plymouth, where Captain Hamlyn still spoke of taking up his quarters for the winter. Several times hopes were raised by the Captain announcing his intention of presently starting; but, true to his nautical training, his movements were never to be implicitly relied on. He would go to a place intending to spend weeks in it, and for no given reason be off the next day. He would go for a day, and a month later he would still be found there.

Rozzy, who possessed a wonderful faculty for getting an insight into the reasons for everything—whether they turned out true or false seemed of minor consequence to him—gave it as his belief that it was in some way to do with 'petticoats.'

'Here!' exclaimed Roger, who, like many men, was exceedingly rigid with youngsters regarding morals, 'stash that, and don't let me hear nothin' of it agen.'

''Tain't none o' my makin's up,' said Rozzy aggrievedly. 'When I was up to House there ashore, I heard some of 'em talkin' about it.'

'All right,' said Roger; 'you let 'em talk.'

'That's just what I did do.'

'Yes; but another time don't you hear.'

'Oh, I don't see that. Better hear what's agin the Cap'en, and that, than be deaf.'

'I don't ask 'ee to be deaf. What I wants is, you should be dumb.'

'Then so well us was clane out o' the world,' grumbled Rozzy. 'I'd rather—iss, fay I w'ud.'

Although Roger had sought to silence Rozzy, he had more than his suspicions that there was some truth in what the lad said. The Captain, usually taking up his quarters at the principal hotel of these seaside towns, would soon become an object of interest and remark to the knots of men always gathered near. The captivating, deferential manner natural to him with all women was termed by them 'gallivantin'.' Flirting without a purpose had not then spread to a lower class, and they did not judge very charitably of 'soldier and navy officers' philanderin's.'

Even Roger, attracted to him as he was, could not divest himself of a certain amount of prejudice. He was by no means so sure that he still desired to see a union between the Captain and Miss Anne. 'Afore,' he soliloquized, 'he gets the rights o' callin' that angel his own, I should like to feel there was no mistake about his bein' in a way worthy of her.'

To be quite worthy, Roger did not believe was within the possibility of any man's power. Miss Anne to him was some one sacred, set apart from the rest of frail humanity, and nothing could have so fully convinced him that the course he had taken with Loyalty was a right one as the outspoken approbation of Miss Anne.

October had been stormy, but November, that much-abused month, brought, as it often does, fine weather and warm. The Captain, very well amused by a visit he was paying at Kingswear, had lately made but little use of the *Racer*. Roger, going as usual one morning for orders, was told to pack up the traps and take the boat round to Plymouth. To hear was to obey; but the Captain, whose plans had been rather upset by a sudden change of mind in a friend, detained Roger by seeming to be irresolute.

'First-rate day for you,' he said; 'wind fair, though not much of it.'

'Plenty, sir, for what we shall want. Was you thinkin' at all of comin' with us?'

'By George, Coode, the very thing! Excellent! That's what I'll do. The Kingsbridge coach will easily take anything we can't stow away. Come, bear a hand, and let's be off. Now I know what I'm going to be after, I'm in a deuce of a hurry.'

A man less well-trained than Roger might have smiled. When was not the Captain in a hurry, especially concerning anything fresh?

Hasty, eager, impetuous, the bane of Carleton Hamlyn's life had been to do first, and to decide after; and the result was that reflection usually brought regret.

But in this instance his satisfaction increased as he realized what he was going to do. Day by day that hankering to settle down in his own home with Anne was growing stronger on him. Only, how was

it possible to bring it about?—how to seem suddenly to disregard barriers which for years he had led everyone to believe were insurmountable? If now, without anything new occurring, he went back to Ferrers and married his cousin, it would very naturally be asked, what, in Heaven's name, had prevented him from so doing long ago? And then, regarding Anne? There again came the tug of war. In what way could he possibly account to her for the more than extraordinary silence he had maintained?

Compunction, remorse, for the true cause had long since died out. There was left behind a scar, but for years past that had hardly been tender to the touch; yet, like the strange, contradictory beings we are, the fear of expressed wonderment, perhaps of ridicule, from those about whom, in ordinary affairs, he cared nothing, deterred him mostly from taking any decisive step in what he began to feel would make the happiness of his future life.

Curiously sensitive in his avoidance of anything likely to cause him pain, Carleton Hamlyn, during these past years, had even shunned a near sight of the coast line of his inheritance; now, with Roger, he meant to go as near as might be inshore, and enjoy a good look around.

High as his spirits usually were, the fine day and freshening breeze made them rise higher. He talked over plans for the following summer, discussed the merits of the larger vessel he had had, and wondered if, after all, he should have to take to her again.

'I don't know,' he said, with a quick-drawn sigh, 'unless something unforeseen turns up, that I could do much better than go off for a long cruise somewhere. I've had a goodish spell of shore-going for me, and by the time April comes round, I shall be quite ready to up stick and away.'

'The pity was, sir, you being stopped from keepin' afloat, and havin' a command.' And Roger glanced at the Captain's empty sleeve.

'Ah, yes!' and he looked ruefully down at it himself. 'One of the fortunes of war, Coode. It was pretty warm work, I can tell you, when that friend took leave of me. I was at our gallant Nelson's side'; and, as was the custom with many of his followers, at mention of the hero's name, the Captain raised his hat. 'Ah, well! 'Twas almost worth an arm, to lose it in such company.'

'You've seen some service, sir, in your time, too.'

'Service! God bless my soul, I should think I had. It's all very well now to ruty-tu-tu up the army, but what I want to know is, where would these fine red-coated gentry be—a set of Johnny-raws as they mostly are—if our gallant fellows hadn't knocked the frog-eating, parlez-vouing mounseers into cocked hats long ago?'

The jealousy between the two services was at this time very marked and bitter, and the Captain, once set going on the stirring events of the time, launched forth into naval grievances and wrongs, and the ill-treatment and unfairness they were receiving; which

all went to show that war being over, and this confounded peace set in, the navy was going to the dogs. Beguiled by this, to every sailor of that and many a later day, all-engrossing topic, the Start, Bolt Head, Bolt Tail, were weathered one after another, and then came a sudden lull. The Captain did not speak, he was looking eagerly around him, taking in, one after another, every familiar point and bearing—of Bigbury Bay,—of Borough Island, where in a cockle-shell of a punt he had gone at the risk of his life to eat, at some unholy hour, hot lobsters; the entrance mouth of the river which ran up to Mothecombe, Pamfleet, Efford—houses in which he had passed many a happy day. Forgetful of those with him, lost to all around, a look came over his face, which made Roger sign to Rozzy to seem occupied with him in something in the opposite direction. A returning sense of not being alone, a pulling of himself together again, made the Captain draw in his breath and seem to offer some explanation by saying—

'After all these years, looking at the old places takes me back to the days when I was a youngster. Lord!' he exclaimed, 'if there isn't still standing there the very stump of the old tree that marks the spot where that poor negro from the ship, wrecked close by, was washed ashore. He died, but they saved the dog; don't you remember him?—old Beppo, that my uncle, the Admiral, had—perhaps before your time, though. And there's the church—

the dear old church—and—that place below, what's that?—a house? No, surely not?'

Roger hesitated—but Rozzy had already rushed in, and proud of his topography was saying:

'''Tis where th' old Jake George lives to, sir. They calls it The Cot—he built it hisself, didn't he, Roger?'

Roger vouchsafed no answer.

'Jake George?' said the Captain—'Jake George?' he repeated; 'do you know the man, Coode?'

'Oh, most about, sir, knows him, and don't know, I'm sorry to say, much good of him.'

'I see'd Loyalty George,' said the irrepressible Rozzy, as if the recollection had only just come to him. 'Her was down to quay the——'

But the Captain interrupted him. 'Loyalty George! is she his——'

'Granddaughter,' said Roger quietly; 'everyone calls her George; she was never known by the father's name.'

Captain Hamlyn gave an almost imperceptible nod of the head.

'Yes, yes,' he said, 'I know—I know;' and he continued silently gazing, while Roger eagerly scanned the stretch of shore in search of Loyalty. But to-day not a trace of any living being was to be seen. There were rocks green, rocks brown, hidden under sea-weed, or standing up sharp and bare, all jostled side by side, with broken shiny reefs running out from them. There were tiny bays, whose many-coloured shingle glistened in the sun, over which the

high tide lapped soothingly, and huge holes which showed like caverns, up into which the big waves trumpeted and roared with deafening fury. And raised above, yet still under shelter of the Cliff's lee, Fairstoke Church showed out her gray walls mantled in greenery; the few hardy trees around gnarled, bent, whitened by the constant baptism of foam and spray. Like its sister church of Ferrers, it lay nestling in the bay, and though three miles away from the village—as it stands now—those who died at Fairstoke were carried by their friends to sleep their last sleep in that silent churchyard by the sea.

Stoke Point was rounded without the Captain speaking another word; then out of the train of thought occupying him, he said suddenly—

'This girl—what is she like?—good-looking in any way?'

While the question was being asked, Roger's eyes had fixed themselves on something aloft. As if he had not heard, he got up.

Here was an opening which Rozzy could not let slip.

'Her's counted a reg'lar right down booty, sir,' he said in a half tone, keeping the while a sharp look-out that Roger did not turn round; 'her's a——' But something had caught Roger's ear, and he threw on Rozzy a look which made that culprit at once duck down his head and throw up his elbow. The pantomime was not lost on the Captain, who usually found much diversion in the conduct of the two. Rozzy held Roger in great awe, and often felt a

sympathetic pity for the Captain, 'who when he axed of un a question, couldn't get for answer beyond a yes or a no. So well be a Maltee man, or a Lascar Injun, if you'd got to sit mumchance without makin' no use o' your tongue.'

Roger's back being again turned, the Captain made a sign that Rozzy should keep silent now, but that he would make further inquiries of him; and not returning to the subject, he began asking about the crabbing, trying to see if he remembered by name any of the men engaged in the trade now. This led on to illicit trading; and Hockaday being mentioned—'Yes,' Roger said, 'there was one child still living—a son—who, he thought, had recently gone off to sea.'

The mention of Ned Hockaday and his going to sea suggested much to Rozzy, who, in anticipation of the tale he would tell, puffed out his cheeks and hugged himself tightly with his arms. This movement, intended to be quite confidential, irritated Roger, who, crossing over to where he was sitting, muttered, as he bent over the boat's side—

'What are ye doin' that for, you young fool, eh? Mind I don't knock ye overboard. Out there!—d'ye hear.'

'Iss,' said Rozzy stolidly, 'if you was to, I should most like be drowned, same as you'd ha' been if Loyalty George hadn't come down Shag Clift and saved 'ee;' and he looked up at the butting crag they were just coming to.

'What's that?' said the Captain quickly. 'Saved? Saved who? You, was it?' and he looked at Roger.

'It happened, sir, years ago'—Roger spoke with indifference—'I was a mere lad at the time.'

'A lad, were you? Ah! and this child—her age?—let me see.'

'She's now a woman grown,' said Roger stiffly, vexed with the conversation being brought again to Loyalty. It was not only that with men of the Captain's class he did not wish to speak about her, but, with the knowledge of Captain Hamlyn's particular relations with the family, the less any bygone recollection was stirred up, the better it must be for him.

'A woman grown!' repeated the Captain. 'A woman grown, did you say?'

'Well, sir, from eighteen to twenty, or somewhere thereabouts.'

'So she must be,' and he sat for a minute or two dreamily. 'Twenty years—Good God! how long ago that seems to me!—twenty years!' and rounding the great mass of stone, thick covered by the gulls fanning their wings while uttering their plaintive cry, there came in sight the gray buttress of Ferrers House, that side which looks out on the sea, where the wall is supported by the carved griffins over the door.

Yes, twenty years had passed since on the steps of that door he, Carleton Hamlyn, had said good-bye to home, to happiness, to Anne.

He turned his head away—over his face a shadow came—into his throat a choking lump. 'Surely no other man had been so sorely punished for an act of folly.'

CHAPTER XXIX

AT Plymouth Dock there is, or was, if the besom of improvement has not swept it away, a row of houses in Richmond Walk, called Baker's Place, principally let as lodgings in that day. It was here that, after some delay, Captain Hamlyn took up his abode. The Fountain Inn he didn't care for; the old Prince William Henry—scene of many of his midshipman adventures—might prove as a stopping-place a trifle rackety. Moreover, in furtherance of certain schemes and plans from which he built castles in the air, the Captain's desire was to have rooms to which he might ask ladies—Anne and Miss Yelland, why should they not come? Already, in fancy, he saw them seated there.

For the *Racer* nothing could be more convenient than this situation. The harbour of Stonehouse Pool was quite handy, the landing-place under Mount Wise not a stone's-throw away.

During the weeks they had been there, Roger had had no reason for discontent at the liberty given him; whenever he had asked for leave the Captain had never said no. Through Rozzy he had come to understand that Roger and Loyalty George were

keeping company, and more than once he had tried to sound him on the matter; but about Loyalty, Roger could not be brought to breathe a syllable.

Nervously anxious to seem at his ease, the Captain assumed a tone of jocularity, prefacing what he had meant to say by telling Roger that he was glad to hear he'd an eye for a pretty woman. But the solemnity with which this pleasantry was received made it fall as flat as ditch-water; and the Captain assured himself that in some things Coode was a prig, and it was no use trying to get anything out of him.

But if Roger's secretiveness and reserve irritated the Captain, he had ample revenge in the garrulity of Rozzy, who, inflated by the importance of being listened to, eagerly told all he could pick up at every opportunity.

'Roger and Loyalty was to be married before long. Th' ole Mrs. Coode was mazed about his takin' up with she. Roger might have married Phœbe Rowe if he'd been minded to, but he was always after Loyalty. It began with him givin' a warmin' to Rozzy's big brother Joe for gamucksin', and jackactin' afore her like *so!*' and Rozzy conveyed by a gesture the insult intended; 'and then her saved his life at Shag Cliff. 'Twas there they allays met to now. Evenin' times you'd often see her leanin' agenst the stones, on the chance that p'r'aps he'd come. Some chaps wondered; they—Rozzy reckoned—was jealous. For her *is* a purty-faced one,' he said; 'there ain't any I see here—and

there's lots of 'em hangin' about—is fit to hold a candle anighst her. Her hair, all curly and that, and her cheeks red as two pineys, and her eyes they rolls so—round and round. He's goin' to see her Thursday. I took the word to ole Dunchy that you'd gived he leave. She'll be there, no fear.'

The Captain took a shilling from out his pocket.

'There's no need,' he said, 'for you to say to Coode what you tell me. Here!'

Rozzy touched his hat, while his mouth stretched nearly from ear to ear. The Captain's innocence tickled him immensely.

Tell Roger! Why, he would have broken every bone of his body.

Rozzy was—alas! is still—of a fisher-village growth; hard work, heavy burdens, scanty food, tell on mother and child. He was cunning and sharp in self-interests or preservation, quite competent to carry on the routine of his ordinary occupation and daily life, yet something was wanting in the mind, something to develop it beyond the instincts of an animal.

As Captain Hamlyn walked away, a plan, the germ of which was already planted, developed itself. He would see this girl—would see for himself what she was like. Fascinated by this new curiosity which had lately taken possession of him, he could not rid himself of the idea; it returned to him constantly. His wish was that he could have had a sight of her unobserved, and if things had gone on in

their natural way, this might have been; but as it was, no sooner was he settled at Dock than Anne, in the oddest way, started suddenly for Weymouth, saying she should be back in a fortnight, instead of which, there she was now, and perhaps there she intended to remain the whole winter away.

Very huffed and put out of humour, he felt it was of no use waiting for Anne, and after this he tried to stifle the desire, to put it aside; but strive as he did, or thought he did—for combating with inclination had never been the Captain's way—the desire only grew stronger, until, like the emotionally-feeble man he was, he called Roger back after he had let him go; and this being Thursday, said:

'Oh! Coode, it had quite slipped my mind, but I want you to see after a dog they're keeping at Thancks for me—to bring it back, if it's any worry. I'm afraid I said I didn't want you, didn't I? Will this make any difference? If you have Friday, will it be the same?'

'Quite so, sir. Whatever day suits you is all the same to me.'

And after listening to the rest of his directions, Roger went, leaving the Captain already regretful of the step he had taken. Still, to take it for nothing would be very absurd. The thing he thought he'd do would be to send for a sort of gig he was in the habit of hiring, and have it driven by a road turning out of the Plymouth road, which he knew, to the top of a certain lane near Niton, where he could get

out, and—well, do what he might then feel inclined for. There was no reason to decide more now. How often had this very indecision landed Carleton Hamlyn in the most perilous situations, out of which there was no way without falling into temptation.

'Somewheres about four,' Rozzy had given as the hour of meeting, and halfway between three and that hour Captain Hamlyn reached the spot he had decided on.

Telling the groom not to expect him for an hour, or perhaps more, he got out to reconnoitre. The motive which had brought him had given way by this time to a host of recollections crowding thick one on another. At an angle, over a gate, partly unhinged and stuck, which Carleton lifted, laughing like a schoolboy to hear its familiar creak again, a back view of Ferrers House could be seen. He walked on to a point which one of the windows overlooked. Why not go on—on to the point he had meant? He might get a sight of the girl in passing, and from a dip near strike into a path which would lead him up to the house.

Full of fresh plans, he walked along, casting his eyes here and there as he went. Nature's face, if left to Nature's hands, alters but little; the very blades of grass seemed as he had left them twenty years ago.

'Baw!'

Captain Hamlyn started back. From behind a bush someone had jumped up, and was now stand-

ing more startled than he. The eager look of happy expectation was still in the large lustrous eyes, the smile had not left the half-parted rosy lips. Never, never in his life, he was saying to himself, had he seen such a divinely exquisite creature, and quickened within him stirred a newly-created love, an unselfish, pure affection, such as he had never before felt.

'I—I thought——'

The Captain came to the rescue.

'That my name was Roger, did you think?'

'Oh, you knows, then,' she said, relieved. 'Yes, I took your step for his'n, 'cos 'twas he I was lookin' to see.'

'I'm afraid for to-day you'll be disappointed.'

The homeliness of her speech somewhat destroyed the illusion. Oh, that she but had an educated tongue!

'Did he ax 'ee to tell me so?'

'Well, to say the truth, I didn't tell him I was coming. I have tried several times to draw him into talking, but he doesn't care to speak to anyone about you.'

'No, I reckon; it ain't very upholdin' to un to have to own he's took up with such as I.'

The Captain's brows were slightly contracted.

'Any way,' he said, 'I had made my mind up to see you, so I told him I'd give him leave another day.'

Loyalty's face betrayed her horror; her eyes at once fixed themselves on the sleeve of his missing arm.

'Why, you'm the Cap'en! Oh, my!'

'My dear child,' and he caught her by the hand, 'for God's sake don't shrink from me as if I was your enemy!'

'No,' she said earnestly. 'I don't hold 'ee as that, any ways.'

'That's right, that's right. I couldn't have borne that you should feel any hatred to me.'

'I don't. Grandfer talks, but I never joins in. You couldn't help what father brought 'pon his own head. They that breaks the laws must pay for't, though they'm drove mad, as he, poor soul, was, through bein' dragged off from house and home.'

Captain Hamlyn did not seem to listen; for a moment he seemed lost in contemplation. Looking at her fixedly, with growing pride and admiration, 'Lovely!' he murmured; 'most lovely!' And then, smiling at what he was saying, he added: 'You know it, don't you? You know that you are lovely?'

'Well, I've heard it often enough to,' she said indifferently; 'not that I sets much store on my looks. You'm handsome, too, and knows it, I reckon, just so well as I do.'

The Captain laughed delightedly.

'Then we're a handsome pair,' he said; and as he spoke he threw his arm round her waist.

'Here, none o' that,' and she moved quickly back from him. 'I never allows no liberties to be tooked with me.'

'Liberties, my child! Mine are not liberties, it is that I love you, I——'

'Oh, iss, so do the rest of 'em, only I'll be loved at a distance, if 'tis all the same to you.'

'But you don't understand.'

'No, nor I don't want to, neither.'

'Listen, Loyalty. You'll let me call you Loyalty, won't you?'

'Well, you've took French leave, it 'pears to me.'

'Yes, but look, what I want is to do you some good, to be of benefit to you in some way. Come now, tell me—tell me some wish you have.'

'I ain't a got none.'

'Nonsense! no wish?'

'Well, not none that you could satisfy. I wishes th' ole Mrs. Coode wasn't so spitish, but so well wish for the moon as to look for any change in she.'

'And you should have the moon if I could give it you. Ah, how different everything would be if I had you to be with me and to care for me.'

'La bless 'ee,' she said innocently. 'You never heerd tell of no maid as was as awkward with her needle as I am; and as for choors, what I does is all of a muddle.'

The Captain was getting a good flavour of gall mixed with his cup of happiness, but he swallowed it all bravely down, saying with a smile—

'My dear child, I meant—if you lived with me, so that I could take you about and show you things, and teach you anything you wanted to know.'

In an instant the smile on Loyalty's face was

swept away, and in its place came a look of outraged indignant anger.

'Look here,' she said, 'what have I ever done to you that you should come offerin' your insults to me? Haven't 'ee spoilt my life enuf as 'tis? Have 'ee forgot who I am? Is the moosic o' one set o' gibbet chains in your ears so sweet as to set 'ee hankerin' after more? What did 'ee take me for, then? Did 'ee think to find me falled so low that I should "Thank 'ee" for whatever mud you chose to fling at me?'

Distressed beyond measure, the Captain put out his hand.

'Loyalty,' he cried, 'my—my dear girl!'

'Now don't anger me with no names.'

'You don't understand me,' he said helplessly.

'Oh, don't you fear that—iss, I do; 'tis me that's past understandin' with you. Only,' and she made a step forward, 'that you ain't worthy for un to waste his strength 'pon, I'd turn 'ee over into Roger's hands, so you might learn the maulin' he gives to such sort as you be.'

'Loyalty,' groaned Captain Hamlyn, irresolute as to how best he should undeceive her.

'Loyalty!' she sneered, echoing him. 'Yes, 'tis Loyalty has had the dealin's with such black-hearted raskils before, and has set the score of her name all over 'em!' and with her hands before her she stood trembling in her wrath.

'God help me!' cried Captain Hamlyn. 'What

am I to do?—keep this wretched secret from her, and lose the last chance of peace and happiness and reparation given to me? Tell her I will, tell her I must. Loyalty,' for she had already turned away, 'come back and listen to me.'

'Listen to what?' she said roughly.

'To something I am going to say to you.' He stopped and stood for a moment, looking fixedly at her. Within him was welling up a fresh spring of affection, of respect, towards this being, born of him; he had forgotten the deplored accent, the uneducated speech, the homely sing-song of the Devonshire tongue—all was swallowed up in the new-found pride he felt for her. Surely, in some way, the feelings, the natural outgoing he had for her, must be shared.

'I cannot part with you in this way,' he began.

'Oh, that'll do,' and she would have turned away, but he forced her to remain.

'God forgive me if I am wrong in what I am doing—there is no one left to bear the blame but me. Up to now the secret has been mine; not a living soul else knows it. Loyalty, you are my daughter!'

She stood a statue of stone—not a word, not a sign—she did not even look at him. Her eyes were fixed, but in them was no expression.

'Your mother, poor soul, was a gentle, trusting creature. I, Loyalty, was young, the only excuse for me. The war broke out, I was hurried off to

sea, and she, knowing not what else she could do, consented to marry Kellow. How or from whom he learnt what was the truth I never knew; but, from the moment he saw I was on board his ship, believing that I had added to my other wrong by being the instrument of his being pressed and carried off to sea, he swore that he would be the death of me, and soon dealt the blow which proved fatal to him.'

'Though 'twas you most deservin' of it,' said Loyalty sternly.

'And I would have willingly paid the penalty. All that man could do I did to save him, but the task was a hopeless one—he suffered on the following day. Now do you understand?'

'What you says I do, but I've only got your word for it.'

'And you can never have any other.'

'Well, 'bout that I ain't so sure. If 'tis true, grandfer knows; if he don't, you'm telling me a lie.'

Captain Hamlyn seemed to stand at bay again.

'But doesn't anything here speak to you, tell you that I'm your father?'

'If it does, I shouldn't give credit to it; scores o' times it's told me the other way, when I'd ha' given worlds not to belong to that danglin' body and them whitenin' bones.'

'At least you'll say good-bye to me now,' and he held out his arm to embrace her.

'No, I shan't, not that way. As I've told 'ee, I

can't trust to 'ee yet. On your own showin', you've allays been one of the deceivin' order.'

He looked at her reproachfully.

'That's very hard on me,' he said. 'Those that haven't been tempted generally are hard.'

'Then I must be so soft as dough.'

'I don't find you so; on the contrary, you won't in any way trust me.'

'The pity is the poor soul I calls mother hadn't treated 'ee the same. I should ha' been spared drainin' many a cup o' sorrow dry.'

The Captain nodded his head, while beating with his foot on the ground.

'Then is this to be the end?' he said, 'that you won't listen, won't trust, won't believe anything I say? Oh, Loyalty!'

'You forgets the lump it's come upon me; but I promise, now I've heerd, I'll find if it's false or true, and if it turns out as you say——' she hesitated.

'You'll let me see you again?'

'Yes.'

'Meet me here, at this place?'

'I don't know; I can't be sure 'bout Roger's likin' it. Where do 'ee live? Haven't 'ee got somewheres where you goes to when you'm ashore?'

'Yes, certainly I have. I'll give you my address, and you'll write to me.'

'I can't; I don't know how.'

'But when you want to send to Coode, what do you do?'

'I don't never want to; if I did I should ax Dunchy to go.'

'Well, let Dunchy come to me.'

'Yes, I don't mind leavin' it that ways. I'll send word by he, then, when I'm comin'. And on this bit o' paper,' the Captain had torn and given her a leaf out of his pocket-book, 'is writ down where you lives to? All right; you'll have to holler to him, 'cos he's so hard o' hearin'.'

Again the Captain stretched out his arm.

'You won't trust me, then?' he said reproachfully.

'No, not yet I can't.' There was relenting in the tone. ''Fore all, I'm Roger's promised wife, and nothin' must happen to make me hang my head in face of he.'

CHAPTER XXX

On her way back to The Cot, Loyalty was filled with a tumult of emotion. Everything in life seemed changed, unsettled, unreal. What might happen next she did not know.

In spite of the doubts she had expressed to the Captain, a something told her that what he said was true; not the instinct which he had desired, but the recollection of her grandfather's vile abuse, the curses and imprecations she had heard him utter, never against Kellow, whom at times he mentioned, but always against *her father.* And one especially vituperative epithet came back that, when his rage

had been at its height, the brutal old man had used towards her, this now came back with a significance that left her little doubt.

Suddenly her heart would beat in a sort of ecstasy, and she would hold her head up high, to be followed by a chill brought by the fresh disgrace cast on her; and her steps would lose their elasticity, and her whole figure would seem to relax and droop.

To have it out with her grandfather—that was her main object now. This evening he was unluckily away. Wakeham had sent for him to go to the Mewstone, and a message from him meant that some night-work was coming on.

Loyalty was forced to go off to bed without there being any sign of old George's return. When she awoke the next morning it was to find that he had evidently come back, but had gone again. A cross piece of wood significantly placed in a particular spot indicated what was on hand, and was a sign to Loyalty to make the preparations which fell to her share. These occupied her until the afternoon, when, with the prospect that Roger might come, she made herself what she termed 'tidy and all-a-tant-o.'

Fresh and sweet as a rose in June, she took her way to the Cliff, in expectation that her lover would come. The hope of seeing him was not quite its usual unalloyed bliss. Loyalty could not help feeling that unless the Captain had spoken there was something that for the present she must conceal. It was a secret not her own, neither had she yet arrived at

a decision of how much it would be right for her to tell. Would it make any difference to Roger? Would it make him think less or more of her?

While debating this question, she did not hide herself as yesterday she had done, but with strained eyes stood looking out afar, her heart beating quickly, when, after a time, she saw Roger coming along.

'So you thought to see me?' he said; and Loyalty was glad that her face was still hidden against his when he went on to say, 'You was in the tantrums, I reckon, when I didn't come yesterday afternoon?'

'I 'spected you was kept by somethink, or that somebody wanted 'ee,' she said hesitatingly.

Roger laughed. 'Tish, these gentlefolks!' he said, 'they is amusin'. They don't know what next to be up to theirselves, nor what to set them about 'em doin'. Nothin' else 'ud serve my lord down there, but to send me buznackin' off after some dog he'd left up to Thancks. Such a fool's errant to go on! They reg'larly guffawed, all of 'em up there. But they know what he is, and for that matter, so do I. In a deal he does, there's many a deuced sight worse; and in others, there ain't many better.'

Loyalty, by this time assured that the Captain's visit was unknown, was able to look at Roger. She managed her deception very cleverly, and would have defended herself by saying she had served a whole apprenticeship to the acting of lies.

'You gets on with un very well?'

'First-rate; capital. He's always very chummy with me.'

'Does he ever make any mention of grandfer?' She did not dare to say 'of me.'

'No, never, but once; he asked me if I knowed him; that was all.'

'Is he in any ways a gay sort o' man?'

'Well, 'bout that I can't give not a right down plain yes or no. 'Tisn't that I've seen anything, still, for all that, I ain't so prepared to give my consent to his havin' Miss Anne.'

Miss Anne! Could Miss Anne know?—was this the meaning of her kindness?

Loyalty's silence was interpreted by Roger as pain; and to soften it he added, ''Tis only my misgivin's, remember—I've nothin' to go by.'

And the conversation slid away from this topic to their own affairs, just then very engrossing to both of them. Roger was going home to see his mother. Somehow he couldn't help fancying, he said, that she was coming round; he thought he saw a difference in her.

Poor Roger! This wish was so paramount in him, that he was constantly catching at some straw of hope.

Mrs. Coode's disappointment had been cruel, the more bitter to bear because of the certainty with which she had buoyed herself. It had taken all the time of Roger's absence to school herself to play the part she meant to, for come what might, she was

determined that no one, least of all her son, should see the anguish his two decisions gave her.

The first time that Roger came home, he was anxious and eager to enter into explanations, but Mrs. Coode on the very threshold silenced him. She had no wish, she said, to be told any more than she already knew. He had settled his own affairs as best pleased him, that was enough for her.

'"Tis your own life, Roger,' she said, 'though I gived it to you; and the way it's spent you'll have to answer for, not me. Also the woman you choose for wife; you marries her, I don't. You've got to live with her; thank the Lord, I haven't. While breath is spared me, I shan't never forget you'm my son—the only son of his mother, and she a widow.' This was said with a poignancy that went through Roger like a stab. 'Neither am I in any way afeard that I shall lose that respect you've always gived to me. So long as I've the shelter of a roof, to that home you'll be as ever welcome. What I'm possessed of in this world's goods will all be yours, only you'll have to wait for it till it pleases God to take me. And this being understood between us, there's never no need to go back to it again. There'll be plenty to talk 'bout in what's goin' on around; we can leave bygones to be bygones.'

This speech of Mrs. Coode's had been carefully prepared, thought out, considered, prayed over. Once delivered, she could by no artifice of her son's be brought back again to one of the subjects it contained.

She did, as she said, talk of everybody and everything; but Roger felt that between his mother and him the great wall of China had been built up, and they were as far apart as though she lived in Europe, and he in Asia. The estrangement pained him; it took away the relish of coming home, and he would go from her with his heart heavy or hot with anger. And having given him a frigid good-bye, Mrs. Coode would hasten to the upper window, and there stealthily watch him out of sight. The fulness which came ready to choke her she resolutely pressed down; even to herself she would not admit the anguish which was making every hour of her life more bitter. Her neighbours, chilled by the austerity of her demeanour, spoke of her as taking 'her trouble hard.' Some of the more daring spirits tried by a word of sympathy to stick a pin or so into her pride; but Mrs. Coode's armour was invulnerable; and they left her saying she was 'a most onnatural woman, they didn't believe she'd got any feeling, or knew what it was to be sick or sorry.'

Naturally, the incident had caused an unacknowledged breach between her and Phœbe. Old Rowe, too, was not over-cordial to her. Circumstances had made it seem more desirable than ever that he should have Roger as a partner, and, like the small-natured creature he was, he felt sure the failure was the fault of somebody. It was Mrs. Coode's, Phœbe's, of either or both, so long as he could continue to nag, nag and worry. And Phœbe—true daughter of such

a father—followed the same plan, so that the two of them were constantly quarrelling.

When later in the evening Roger again met Loyalty, he told her he couldn't say for certain when he should be over again.

'I've been turnin' it over in my mind,' he said, 'and I don't feel so sure that sendin' me off after that there dog mightn't ha' been a bit of a hint for me not to ask for leave quite so often; and as I shall want a day or so soon—well, about Christmas, say——'

Here the anticipation of that event for which the leave would be needed gave rise to so much interruption that Roger, careful not to keep Loyalty out with him too late, hurried to say good-bye.

'Then I shan't see 'ee for ever so long?' she said.

'No.'

'But you'll come if you can?'

'Well, if he says I must, I shall have to.'

'Shall I go and coax un to let 'ee, eh?'

'Let me catch 'ee at it.'

And shaking his head at her, Roger turned away; and swiftly Loyalty recollected of whom she was speaking—in the happiness of the hours she had been passing with Roger, the startling announcement of the day before had slipped her memory. It was too late that night to begin speaking to her grandfather, added to which, if he had returned, it was not certain that he would be alone. Except what her sharpness and the knowledge of her earlier years

led her to guess at, very little connected with these 'secret runs' was known to her now, most of the active work being carried on by Wakeham at the Mewstone. That something was up she was certain by 'that boy o' Wakeham's hanging about The Cot, as for days he'd done. She would have to make sure he was out o' the way before she spoke, for the young ferrit 'ud suck in every word you let fall.'

As she foresaw, Jake George was not at home when his granddaughter returned, neither did she see him until the afternoon of the following day; then, coming in with a load of wood which she had been along the shore collecting, she came upon the old man sitting by the fireside.

Unable to rid herself of the fear in which she stood of him, now he was there face to face for her to speak to, her courage began to ooze away.

'Oh lors!' she groaned inwardly, 'won't he out with a volley o' oaths the minute I lets fire!' and her eyes glanced rapidly round to see that there was nothing in the way handy for him to fling in case he was minded to. 'I'd best go out and see if that boy's anyways near,' she thought; in reality to give herself a further respite, and she lingered, looking rather aimlessly around while she debated how she should best begin.

With a sudden bolt forward she was indoors. 'Look here,' she said, in the rough loud tone which had become habitual to her when speaking to her grandfather, 'I wants to hear from you what there's

to tell about mother and my father. Who was he, eh?'

George laid down his pipe, and slowly turning round, looked at her. Satisfied apparently that there was nothing new or strange in her appearance, he as slowly turned round again and resumed his smoking.

'Come,' she said, this time her voice a little unsteady, 'you heerd what I axed—just you give me a answer. The name o' he I's got the rights to call father?'

He uttered a half-smothered savage yell like the infuriated howl of a wild animal; then jumping up, he seized by its back the seat he had been sitting on, and raising it, made as if he would dash it at her. The violence of the action, and the murderous expression which accompanied it, would have made most women faint with fear; it was what Loyalty needed to steady her. In an instant her nerves were iron; she felt within her the courage of a lion, and that she possessed a lion's strength too.

She caught at the chair, wrenched it from out his hand, and flung it to the far end of the room.

'Have 'ee forgot who you'm standin' up agenst? I ain't now the poor little helpless maid you've many's the time half murdered. Where I've a pitched that settle I could pitch you, and won't say I shan't do it, too, unless you gives me my answer.'

Choking with rage, the old man could not utter a word. Every limb shook as if palsied, and from his throat came a click, click, but no articulate sound.

'Tiger cat!' he hissed out at last.

'Iss,' she said, 'anythin' you likes to call what you've made me, I am.'

'Who've ye bin with,' he stammered breathlessly; 'who've ye bin talkin' to?'

'The man whose wife I hopes to be—Roger Coode. But he ain't got nothin' to do with the question I wants a answer to. Now I knows the meanin' o' the name you called me by'—and she leaned towards him, drawing in her breath as if the recalling of that name still scorched her. 'Now I can tell why 'tis you hated, ill-used me; taught me all the evil you did, and would ha' gloated if I'd but fell into the pits you see'd set for me all around. I was his child—that was it—the child o' he whose ears was set tinglin' with the curses you called down on un, the hell fire you hoped to see un burnin' in—and had no claim for father on the poor soul as was strung up for dealin' un a blow.'

Helpless as a caged beast, the old man beat his fists on the table, pouring out the most blood-curdling oaths and imprecations.

'Why didn't I tear ye limb from limb when you was born?' he cried. 'What did I suffer ye to live for? Oh, Susan, Susan!' and he dropped suddenly down and buried his face in his arms.

'Why didn't 'ee?' she said remorselessly; 'you'd ha' been doin' a service then to child and mother.'

'It's false,' he said furiously; ''twas the promise I made her then that spared ye; the oath I took

and sealed on her dying lips, that come what might I'd hide her shame—that's kept me silent all the years to now.'

Again his head was bowed down, his quivering twitching face hidden from view, and Loyalty stood looking at him. Gradually there came over her a change—a softening, womanizing change—her eyelids trembled, her nostrils worked, the corners of her mouth drooped low. She stretched out her hand, then drew it back, to put it out again and lay it on the old man's back.

'Grandfer,' she said, 'you needn't say no more. Things shall bide as they be. You've kept her secret well; no livin' soul shall ever hear it breathed by me.'

He gave no sign that he had heard.

'Whoever else's child I am,' she added, 'I'm hers. Can't 'ee think o' that sometimes, and let it draw 'ee to me? You'm got up an ole man, grandfer, now; you ain't got the strength in 'ee you had.'

''Tis true,' he said, starting up; 'there ain't no time to lose.'

''Bout what?'

'Taking now the vengeance that's my due.'

'No, no,' and she forced him into his seat again; 'there mustn't be no talk like that. I'll go to—the one who spoke to me and make un swear a Bible oath never to breathe no word of what he told to me again. And, grandfer, us must be differ'nt, you and me. Us 'as got somethin' to share in now. Think

o' me as *her* child, and I'll never forget so long as I draw breath that you're *her* father.'

And saying this, Loyalty's eyes welled over, so that without waiting for a reply she went out to where her tears might flow freely.

The old man heard the creak of the door, and felt the puff of keen sea air. He raised his head to see that he was alone. With difficulty, for his failing limbs would scarcely support him, he rose to his feet, dragged himself by the table to the tiny window, and looking out saw Loyalty, her back turned to him, standing out, below the steps, there. And raising his trembling hand he clenched his fist, and, shaking it, called down the wrath of Heaven upon her.

CHAPTER XXXI

OLD Dunchy was sitting disconsolately in front of his tumble-down cottage, which, jammed in a cleft like the nest of a bird, overlooked the ferry.

Loyalty, coming from behind, suddenly caught sight of him.

'Oh, here's you be,' she said, 'lookin' so happy as if the cat had 'ee.'

'And that's just 'bout how I feels,' was Dunchy's melancholy reply.

'Why, what's up?—what have 'ee been doin' of?'

'Well, mostly tryin' to persuade them I see that they wanted to go over 'cross there. But, lors, so well whistle psalms to the taffrail! Not they—

nobody don't want to do nothin' now, 'ceptin' 'tis what they can do theyselves.'

'Now that ain't true,' and she sat down beside him, changing her position after a moment, so that she might face him, by kneeling on a smooth, worn stone below—'there's a somethin' I can't do, and I wants you to do it for me.'

'All right,' said the old man, trying to maintain his moody expression; 'I s'poses I shall have to. What is it, eh?'

'Well,' and Loyalty took a deep-drawn breath, as if what she was about to say cost her an effort—'I wants 'ee to go to Dock for me.'

'Awh, certingly!'—Dunchy's features were unknitted, ready to smile—'an' bring yer sweetheart home to 'ee? Be careful of un,' and he dandled his arms before her. 'Trate un as if he was a new-born babbie, or Missy's waxen-faced doll.'

'Here, you stow that jabber!' and she gave him a little push, smiling at him as she did so. 'No; but, Dunchy, listen. 'Tis very partick'ler what I wants you to do—somethink no livin' soul must know; and I couldn't trust to none but you.'

'All right. If 'tis to be done, I'll do it.'

She gave a nod in assurance of his fidelity, and leaning her elbows on his knees, so that her mouth was brought close to him, she said, speaking slowly and distinctly:

'Do 'ee know of a place to Dock called Baker's Place?'

'Baker's Place! Seems I've heerd tell o' the name. Is there any grog-shop you knows of near by?'

Loyalty shook her head.

'No; but it's in Richmond Walk, not far from Mount Wise landing-steps; and if you gets out and climbs up, over past where Daddy Johns's lets his boats out to, you'm all but there.'

'I see. Well——'

'Well, then you must look 'long the houses for number three, and when you finds it, take the knocker and knock, and ax to see Cap'en Hamlyn as lives there.'

'Get alongs with 'ee!' exclaimed Dunchy, thinking he was being made the object of a practical joke; 'you habn't a-got up dreamin' 'tis April fool's day, have 'ee?'

'Sit still,' she said, for in his impatience he had half risen. 'I'm sayin' what I means, and what you'm to do.'

'You is?' and he stared at her in bewilderment. 'The Cap'en! Ax for *he!* Why, what do 'ee think he'll do when he sees who 'tis?'

'He'll know,' she said significantly. 'All that's to say is, "Her'll come o' Friday. Get the rids o' Roger."'

Dunchy's jaw fell; his mouth gradually opened wide; speech seemed to fail him.

'What do 'ee look at me like that for?' she said, quickly grasping the suspicion that had entered into

the old man's mind. 'You bain't thinkin' evil of me, Dunchy, be 'ee? Awh!' There was anguish, regret, reproach in the groan.

'No,' cried Dunchy eagerly, his face clearing—'no, I'd trust 'ee anywheres! I don't believe the king upon his throne could lead 'ee astray; only—well, 't has pretty nigh took all the wind out o' me.'

'I knowed you'd think it strange; and if I could, I'd tell 'ee what 'tis about. 'Tain't that I don't put trust in 'ee, but Roger even ain't to know.'

'What, never?'

'No, I've tooked a solemn oath not to tell.'

'H'm,' said Dunchy, 'when you'm married, I dunno. If I was you, I should, be what it may. 'Sides which, there ain't no reason not to; you'm two now, then you'll be one. 'Tain't no breakin' o' oaths then, what you tells he. What's yourn is his'n, and what's his'n's yourn.'

A beam of joy burst over Loyalty's face. To feel she might tell Roger lifted off half her burden; and soon, too, he might know—very soon; directly they were married she would tell him.

'Oh, Dunchy,' she said, 'whenever I brings any trouble to you, you always sets it right, and gives me proper advice what to do.'

The culpable old boatman, whose baseness of morals gave scandal to most around, was in Loyalty's eyes a mentor, and the respect he knew she gave him kept him from losing all for himself.

'Bless 'ee, the Lord love 'ee!' he said, with a laugh

of incredulity, patting her peach-like cheek with his horny hand. 'And that toad Roger's goin' to get 'ee gived to un, and p'r'aps ull take 'ee away. You mustn't now cast off the old Dunchy, you know. You must give me sometimes a sight of 'ee.'

'O' course,' she said, with a pretended bridle of her head. 'Shan't I have to deal for my fish with 'ee? There'll be a chance for passin' off a smelly lot.'

'No, no, now; none o' that!' said Dunchy, wincing under an imputation he was occasionally given credit for.

'I knows all about it,' she continued teasingly——'rushin' the water through 'em, and trimmin' up their gills with a little bit o' salt. You'll never be like the old Mr. Vizzick, who told Mr. Yabsley he was dyin' so easy as a feather-bed could make un, all through feelin' he never cheated nobody in coals, nor gived 'em short weight.'

'Don't you fear,' said Dunchy huffily. 'My dyin' won't be made oneasy by countin' up the manys stale fish I's passed off. There's so precious few I can ever find anywhere's to take 'em of me! 'Tis sniff, sniff 'fore I gets time to hoist down the basket off my shoulders.'

'Come, don't 'ee be chuff,' she said, taking him by the sleeve. 'Now let's hear that you knows where 'tis you'm goin' to, and what's to say when you gets there.'

'"Baker's Place, Richmond Walk, Number three."'

'Iss.'

'"Her'll come o' Friday. Get the rids o' Roger."'

'That's it. Hallo!' she cried, turning suddenly round; 'what's that? Who's there?'

A rustle in the trees which fringe the river seemed to be quite near. There was a crackle as if a rotten branch had given way.

''Tain't anybody; they couldn't clamber up here. 'Tis them drabbited roosters up agen amidst my nets, that's what you heerd. If that Jimmy Ducks don't come along soon I'll wring the necks o' some o' they, and bury their bodies where they can't find 'em.'

And he winked knowingly towards Loyalty, who was bending over, almost losing her balance in her endeavours to catch sight of anything moving inshore. 'Quack, quack, quack,' she heard presently, and drawing back as if the sound satisfied her, she said—

'And 'tis what I should do too, and if you'll send me word I'll come to dinner with 'ee.'

Never having been questioned as to where she was going, or what she was going to do, or having any interest shown in what concerned or befell her, it did not strike Loyalty as strange that twice on turning round as she went from The Cot to see Dunchy, she noticed at a distance, coming the same way, Wakeham's boy.

Wakeham's boy did not mean that he was Wakeham's son. He was simply a waif picked up no one knew where, who had gradually come to do the

fetching, carrying, spying, which any illicit trade makes necessary. Sharp far beyond his years, greedy, vicious, he was by turns kicked, cuffed, knocked about, or allowed a freedom which should have been denied him. In an incredibly short time he knew every house where a keg of spirit was dropped, every shop that would welcome lace, gloves, or any light article worth smuggling. The names of the 'free' landlords were at his fingers' ends, and the faces of all the revenue men were known to him.

It was to this young limb of Satan that Jake George turned, telling him to follow Loyalty and bring him back word what she was up to.

'Oh, you'll get somethin' for your work, you blood-suckin' varmint, you.'

George had rightly interpreted the hesitation to obey, and on this assurance, Banyan, for so he was nicknamed, shot off like an arrow, to return a few hours later with the gist of the conversation which he had overheard.

When he came to the message which Dunchy was to deliver, and repeated the words, old George's violent agitation scared him; for some minutes he feared the old man was seized with a fit, and that he should lose the money promised to him. Staggering back, George leaned for support against a piled-up heap of wrack and seaweed, and this letting him sink in, his feet slid away so as to leave him half prostrate, with no power to recover his balance.

'He's bin on the drink, I 'spects, and 's took with

the horrors. I wish I knowed where he keeps what he's worth,' thought Banyan, impressed by an idea prevalent among the smuggling crew that George, not being a drinker, must be a miser with a hoard of hidden-away money. But while he was debating whether he would not go and make search, Jake opened his eyes and staggered up.

'Be off,' he said, fumbling for the pence which when put into Banyan's hand he from habit looked at with dissatisfaction. In reality it was more than he expected to get, in token of which he said—

'Shan't 'ee want no more o' me?'

'When I does I'll tell ye,' said Jake gruffly; and he made a movement of his head which repeated his desire to be relieved of Banyan's company.

Left alone, the miserable man sat down drawn in a heap together, his whole body quivering and twitching. Down his furrowed cheek the tears in great drops came rolling, and every now and again there escaped him an uncontrollable choking sob.

The prostration following on his sudden violent emotion had mastered him. He realized that, mad for revenge, filled with the fury of a wild beast, he was weak and powerless as a child.

He looked at his hands—those sinews of strength that had helped to many a deed of violence; he could not clench them tight, they had not the power then to hold a cup. His legs, tottering, refused to bear his weight; in place of carrying him, he dragged them after him now. His sobs became a howl of

helpless, hopeless agony. And the hardened old miscreant in his despair proffered a prayer, imploring strength to do his work of murderous revenge. That finished, He who gave it might take the life which had been spent in defying its Creator every day.

The calm which gradually came to him gave him a little fresh courage; by degrees he got back his shattered senses, and began trying to weave some settled schemes. This involved recalling all that Banyan had told him, and he found himself repeating over and over again the message to be given by Dunchy: 'Her'll come on Friday. Get the rids o' Roger.'

By that, then, Roger did not know—was to be kept in the dark—the visit was to be a secret from him. A ray of light seemed to come to Jake George. Why not use Roger?—here was a tool at hand—a fire, he believed, ready to burn if it was once set light to.

Not mixed up with the village or its gossip, he knew but little of what was going on; but his eyes and ears had told him that Roger was ensnared by Loyalty, and, recalling different events, he remembered how, the evening that he had come down there, he had quarrelled with Ned Hockaday about her, and knocked the sense out of another man who had made believe to kiss her.

He thought that at least he had got hold of a sure tow-line, one that would drag his victim to him. The details of the whole plan were not clear, but what

was clear was, to rouse Roger's jealousy. That done, by truth or falsehood, he didn't care which or how, he would fan the flame, so that together they worked 'that murderer's' ruin.

The feebleness of the body had spread itself to the mind. The terrible Jake George was nothing but a scarecrow now, the only strength left in him was his hatred for Carleton Hamlyn. He had brooded over his wrongs until they had maddened a brutish, ungovernable nature. The sight of his granddaughter had kept alive the sense of injury. True, he had been silent, but much of that merit was from lack of opportunity. Had Captain Hamlyn been near, so as ever to have fallen into his power, George would have moved heaven and earth to put into effect his oft-expressed wish—to see his enemy die the death of a dog. With advancing age all his desires seemed to merge into this one idea—the hope of some day getting his revenge. The revealing to Loyalty the secret of her birth added a fresh spurt to his animosity, and by the evening of Wednesday—the day Loyalty's conversation with Dunchy had been overheard—he had arrived at the conclusion that this discovery, which at first had so raised his anger, was to prove in the end a mysterious intervention for carrying out his desire.

The point now reached was that Roger must be told of Loyalty's intended visit, and so set to act the spy upon her.

He waited until the boy Banyan came to The Cot

again, and then, having got Loyalty out of the way by sending her with a message for him to the Cat and Fiddle, he said, 'I'll pay ye well, and make it worth yer while, if you keeps mum,' and he indicated to whom the silence must be kept, 'and goes on an errand to Dock for me.'

Banyan nodded acceptance of the mission.

'Do ye know Roger Coode when you sees him?'

'Do I know me granny?' whom certainly Banyan did not know—'o' course!'

'Then I wants you to take that message you heard give to Dunchy to him. I should like it to be writ down on paper if I knew how.'

Writing was a rare accomplishment in country villages at that day.

'I know,' said Banyan. 'I can't set it down myself, but Hockaday's sister's boy, she as keeps the Billy Blue' (the sailor's synonym for Lord Cornwallis extended to the public-houses which bore the popular commander's name), 'he can and he will for me, if you pays me and I takes the paper all ready.'

The old man searched his pockets through, but paper was not plentiful then.

'Perhaps her's got some,' suggested Banyan.

'I don't know.'

But on the possibility, Jake went into the inner room to see. There was little to search through, very few articles of furniture, and only a box or two, and those without lock or key.

When one has no treasures—no money, no letters

—what is there to lock away? Loyalty had no need of places of safety; she had nothing to put in them. Of the two boxes her grandfather opened the first one was filled with her clothes, the other with needles, thread, buttons, etc., two foreign shells—gifts from Roger—a bunch of withered 'boy's love' (southernwood), some four-leaved clover, and an old worn blue silk neckerchief, originally given to Roger by Miss Anne. Stay, though, this was paper—and he unfolded it. There was some writing one side, but that didn't matter.

'Here,' he said, giving it to Banyan, 'won't this do?'

'Us 'ull have to make it,' said the boy.

And thus it happened that the leaf from out Carleton Hamlyn's pocket-book on which he had written his address was to be employed against her to whom he had given it.

Having secured the paper Banyan left, and Loyalty, returning some little time after, could not believe her ears that the sound she heard—very like the croaking of a raven—was her grandfather essaying a song. She stopped to listen, and heard for the first time in her life from him—

> 'Twas between Ebbrow and Yarrow
> There came on a varry strong gale;
> The skipper luicked out o' th' huddock,
> Crying "Smash, man, lower the sail!"'

'Poor old chap,' she sighed, 'singin'! Ah, I never heerd un do anythink like that before. I 'spects he's goin' totlin', and me leavin' un!—whatever will he do?'

CHAPTER XXXII

ROGER COODE stood on Mount Wise—the Mount Wise of that song which Mrs. Coode had reproachfully reminded him his father used to sing—nay, more, he stood at the bottom of Mount Wise hill, below which is the sentry-box leaned against by Poll when, in company with

> 'Bet and Sue,
> Who stood there too,
> A-shivering by her side,'

she flung at the Port Admiral her indignant protest of

> 'Who ever heard in the sarvice of a frigate made to sail
> On Christmas Day, it blowing hard with sleet and snow and hail?
> I pawned my earrings for the beef, it weighed at least a stone.
> Now my fancy man is sent to sea and I am left alone!'

Roger was leaning against the low stone wall, over which he looked down on the landing-steps. It was at a quiet hour of the morning, when few people were about.

The liberty men had gone off, and the shore-going ones were at their work. Roger was on his way to get Captain Hamlyn's daily orders, but, finding himself a good half-hour in advance of his usual time, he had stopped to have a look round, and to, what he termed, ruminate a bit.

To judge by his face, the reflections he was engaged on were of a pleasant nature. A great change for the

better had of late come over Roger, and it was of rare occurrence now that his two natures set up any antagonism.

His hand was thrust into the breast of his shirt, inside which the two ends of his neckerchief were tucked, and while engaged in thought, he fingered gently one of the corners in which something small, wrapped up in paper, was tied.

At length raising himself so that he stood up straight, he looked about, first one side, then the other, and finally over the little wall.

Except the sentry keeping guard below, not a soul could he see, and this ascertained, he drew out the little packet, and taking it from the paper, placed it in the palm of his hand.

It was a plain gold ring, the wedding-ring, which he had purchased the day before; and looking at it, Roger seemed to see, framed by the slender circle, the rapture-lighted face of Loyalty.

He had not told her he meant to buy it, meaning it should be a surprise to her; and as he stood stealthily gazing at it, he pictured her joy, the pretty things she would say, the tender, sweet caresses she would give to it—and to him, too—he was sure of his share for bringing it.

A noise of footsteps made him alter his position—somebody was coming. He quickly shut his hand, and, sailor-like, commenced whistling, so that it should not be fancied that he was doing, feeling, thinking of anything.

He had not looked round, but, judging that now, by his side, someone was standing near, he turned his head, and a boy—a boy he did not know—put into his hand a bit of paper and then scampered off up the hill to join Banyan, who, in the true spirit of a spy, had sent a scout to do what he might suffer for.

Roger stood for a moment watching the boy's retreating figure, then he hastily wrapped up the ring and put it back into its place of safety, after which he unfolded and smoothed—so as to be able to read what was on it—the crumpled piece of paper.

'"Her'll come o' Friday. Get the rids o' Roger,"' he made out with difficulty, written in a laboured way with irregular characters.

'Her'll come. Who'll come?'

But quick as the thought, the *her* had turned to Loyalty. There was no other her to Roger. But no, it couldn't be she. It was a trick someone was playing him—the pleasant look on Roger's face died out; he didn't like tricks, didn't like the people who played them. Taking the paper up to have a yet more critical look at it, he saw the writing on the other side—'3, Baker's Place, Richmond Walk.' Why, that was the Captain's writing. He could swear to it, the R and W, and that little turn with the B. The mystery thickened. A dozen ideas came into his head, to be dismissed before they had formed themselves into shape, until a thought occurred to him of Hockaday—Ned. Surely this was no tomfoolery with him? He knew he was still

knocking about near, because a shipmate he'd met had told him; and Rozzy too, he'd seen him coming out of his aunt's house, the Billy Blue. A shiver ran through Roger. If he thought that Loyalty would ever set foot inside that den of ill-fame, he'd—but imagination failed to suggest to Roger what he'd do. Hockaday, yes, that was it—he'd lay what you liked he'd hit the right nail on the head there. Some maudlin nonsense of trying to entice back to his mother's apron-string this blathering young fool.

Roger was very severe on the poor youth, to whom, hitherto, he had vouchsafed pity. And now he came to turn the thing about, other facts fitted in. Hadn't he seen that old villain Dunchy yesterday; it didn't strike him then; he only thought what a devil of a hurry he was in with some cock-and-a-bull story of having come over to see after the money for a bit of pilotage; but he saw through him now, and remembered that the hoary old sinner had, in his carneying way, put it to him when he was coming home; what day should he tell Loyalty to look out for him?—should he say Friday?—was he certain sure he couldn't come o' Friday? That was that they might know if the coast would be clear. Oh, well, he'd pretty soon have an end put to that—no more o' Dunchy for him; and so he'd give Loyalty to understand, and in very plain language, too. Roger's masterful spirit was rising; he felt a rabid desire to have it out with somebody.

The clock struck ten. Roger started to find that

the last half-hour had gone so swiftly. He ran down the steps leading to the walk below and hurried on, re-perusing every now and again as he went the scrawled message on the paper. But the address, 'Baker's Place, Richmond Walk,' written in the Captain's hand, how was that to be explained? Like many a strong-headed person, Roger liked to believe his conjectures were right ones; still he could not but confess that this was a lock which no key he had found would open. Again there came the question of who would care to warn him. Roger was at a standstill and about to declare himself beaten, when a sudden flash presented Rozzy. Of course! certainly! without a doubt he had solved the mystery. The Captain was constantly in the habit of tearing out these leaves from his pocket-book and using them to send messages, directions, in a hundred different ways. One of them had fallen into Rozzy's hand, and he, having devised this method of acquainting Roger with a fact he wanted him to know, had employed, for he could not write himself, someone to write for him.

'I know I shall be the death of that boy,' was Roger's grateful soliloquy. 'I'll thrash him into the middle of next week,' he said to himself, fully believing at the time he meant to do so, although, notwithstanding Rozzy's fear and awe, quite explained by the threats used towards him, Roger had never laid in punishment the weight of his finger on the poor lad.

'I'll just see him,' thought Roger, referring to his

morning audience with the Captain, 'and according to what he wants I shall know what to be after.'

The Captain was down, he was told, and had breakfasted; but instead, as was usual, of going up at once, Roger was desired to wait, the Captain would send for him. The truth being that Carleton Hamlyn was at his wits' ends to know how in Heaven's name should he dispose of Roger. Accustomed all his life to send anyone under his orders off at a moment's notice, on the wildest, most erratic, scatter-brain errands and messages, now that he had received Loyalty's message to get rid of Roger he could not devise a single plan. Dunchy had seen him early on the previous day, so that he had had ample time to arrange some scheme; but the invention involving some trouble and bother, Carleton, true to his nature, had put it off, put it off, until Roger was there waiting below and he had absolutely not an idea.

'What can I do?' he kept on repeating; 'it's such an absurd thing to have to send a man away, and not to know where to send him, because, after all, it's not so easy as it seems. Of course there are dozens of places he could go to, but what's he to go for? Oh, it's not a bit of good; I must write to St. John's to Chambers, and ask him like a good fellow to keep Coode kicking his heels about there for a few hours, and then send him back with a pretended answer. I'll write a note for Coode to take.'

And therefore Captain Hamlyn explained to Captain Chambers that he would be doing him a great service if he would keep the bearer, Roger Coode, for some hours, and then write a note and give him as if in answer.

Quite pleased with this brilliant solution of his difficulty, the Captain was more than usually beaming.

'You see, Coode,' he began, 'I don't want the boat to-day, and I don't want you—so!'

But Roger, whose desire was running ahead, and whose plans had been matured below, had already got out, 'Thank'ee, sir; I was going to ask, if you didn't want the boat, whether you could spare me?'

'Just so; just so. Only I'm afraid, Coode, not to-day, because of this note—something important to Captain Chambers I want you to take for me. Any other time——'

'It's all right, sir.' Inwardly Roger was saying, 'Another such fool's errand, I'll wager, as I had after that drabitted dog;' but taking up his hat he said, 'Want it taken soon, I suppose, sir?'

'Oh, yes, immediately, directly; don't delay in setting off with it; go at once.'

Now had this order been at all unusual Roger would have felt bound to obey it to the letter, but the Captain always wanted everything done immediately. He would tell you to be off about a thing as speedily as possible, and an hour after be so sorry you had been in such a hurry.

'And come back, sir, I suppose, at once?'

'Not at all—no; I don't want you back. If you find you're in clover, stay. To-morrow at this hour will do for me.'

Roger went out, convinced that it was just as he supposed—no reason on earth for him to go, or at all events for him to hurry off. 'He won't be any the wiser,' he said, 'if I first go and polish off that young vagabond Rozzy. Here,' he cried, catching sight of the culprit, 'I say, what was you up to yesterday? You kept yourself pretty well out o' sight of me.'

'I was ravin' with the toothache,' was Rozzy's dismal reply.

'Oh, toothache—was that all?'

Rozzy looked at him reproachfully. In his opinion that was about enough to bear. 'I don't know what you means by "all,"' he said glumly; 'it 'most drove me mazed. They said that that Tuttel out by Devil's Point wud draw un, and so he tried to; he pulled and hauled, and all but stood 'pon my head, but he's in my jaw now. 'Tain't much good having outside yer door that by God's grace and mercy you kills moles, rats, and all sorts o' vermins and ven'mous creatures, and then can't aise a poor sawl's tooth that's come to 'ee, and that's what he didn't do to me.'

'Have you seen that boy Banyan 'bout this way?'

'No; I shouldn't ha' spoke to un if I had. Why,' he added, answering Roger's look of inquiry,

'didn't 'ee say if you catched me takin' up with he you'd larrup me?'

Roger stood looking so gloomily that Rozzy wondered if he was about to carry out his threat now.

Evidently nothing was to be got from Rozzy.

'You didn't see Dunchy, yesterday?'

'Iss, I did.'

'Well, what did he say?'

'He didn't say nothin', I crookeyed down behind a wall. He'd got a girt stick with un, and after he played that there trick on Hessy Yeo, us boys called after un "Fresh fish," holdin' of our noses this ways, and 't 'as angered Dunchy with me ever since.'

'What wall was it you crookeyed behind? Where did you see him?'

'He was cuttin' into Stonehouse Hill. I reckon he'd been lookin' after you; he came past Baker's Place way.'

'Well, keep your eyes open, and if you sees him or Loyalty—she might come to Dock to-day—you say I'm in search of 'em; they'll know.'

Roger went off full of perplexity, he could not tell how to act or what to think. Rozzy was evidently no party to the conspiracy, and this made the Captain's handwriting on the paper assume a more ominous form. Loyalty had said should she come and coax him—meaning in regard to giving Roger leave—but surely such an act in reality would never occur to her. Then she had asked was he gay? Oh how these suggestions and revelations

tortured him!—and to have to endure them, to be haunted by suspicion, for a whole day! Roger felt it was more than he had courage to bear.

Surely this confounded note might be delivered later on? It would not make such a vast difference in the time. Supposing now that he went off by the way that, if she walked—and Roger felt sure that walk she would—Loyalty would come—well, if he had to go all the way on to Fairstoke, he might get the loan of a boat to take him to Cawsand Bay, and from there to Captain Chambers's house was a mere nothing. That was what he would do; and feeling in his neckerchief corner, to see what money he had tied up there, his fingers touched the ring—he had it in him to fling it into the sea. These mysteries, doubts, suspicions, had stirred into life the old nature. Roger was a different man.

Desirous of saving as much time as possible, he ran on to Poor Man's Corner, got into a boat there, and landed at Stonehouse Hard. From thence he hastened with all speed through by the road—then scarcely more than a lane—which leads by way of Milbay to Plymouth. Notte Street would take him down to the Barbican, and he was soon hurrying past the handsome old-fashioned houses which stood side by side with the shops of block-makers, compass-makers, ship-chandlers, marking the approach to the ancient port.

Roger had decided to cross from the Barbican to Turnchapel, because Loyalty, unlike most of the

Ferrers people, preferred the path by the Cliff to the shorter way to Plymouth by the road.

Ferried across, he scrambled up the landing-place and through a gap in the thorn hedge soon reached the field which skirts Jinny Cliff. Along here he walked, only pausing to look over the steep descent at a point where, hitherto hidden, a little cove runs in, giving safe shelter to a boat—and there a boat lay moored, and curled up in its bottom old Dunchy was sleeping.

The cry of surprise which had escaped Roger turned suddenly into an oath, as his quick eye caught sight of something bundled up on the seat. It was Loyalty's gay-coloured shawl.

The warning he had had, then, was no hoax. It was she who was coming!—was coming, and he had missed her. Roger was already retracing his steps groaning, hissing as he went, at the loss of time. The boat he had come over in had not gone back; he jumped in, seized the oars, and, deaf to its owner's expostulations, rowed himself across. He did not ask himself where he was going; his legs seemed to have decided that question, and also to have decided that they would carry him along with right good will.

He caught some of the remarks made as he dashed past people, heard them call after him: but it would have taken more than a voice to stop Roger.

In preference to Milbay, he went back by the marshes to Stonehouse, through the halfpenny gate, over the little bridge to the foot of the hill, ready to

turn into the road which leads straight to Baker's Place, when a burly figure coming from that same direction opposed him by planting himself in his way, and catching him tight hold by the two shoulders.

'Hallo, my hearty! What breeze is blowing you along at this rate? Where are you bound for, eh?'

Roger recognised a chum he had fallen in with the day before, a good fellow, but being just paid off, like the then Jack ashore, not quite sober—in the stage when argument is in the ascendant.

'I'm in a deuce of a hurry,' said Roger, trying to set himself free; 'I'll be back again in a jiffy; I've got to give a message to my Commodore.'

'If that's all, mate, you'll just drop anchor alongside me'; and the big fellow launched his Herculean body forward, causing Roger to stagger. ''Tain't o' no good your tryin' to go on,' and indeed, while kept in the grip Anderson had on him, Roger felt powerless to move. 'I see your Cap'en,' and the head was nodded sententiously, 'get inside of a coach a hour ago, and drive off Plymouth way with a female woman.'

Fifty Andersons would not have held Roger now. He gave a violent jerk, and was off like an arrow, leaving his bewildered shipmate looking helplessly after him, muttering, as he shook his head mournfully:

'He's drunk! That's what's the matter with him. You can't scud along at that rate, not if you're sober.'

'Cap'en not in?' said Roger.

He had reached the house in Baker Place, but not stopping to knock at the door, as his custom was, had walked straight into the landlady's sitting-room.

'No, nor I don't know when he will be,' she said, a little huffed at what she chose to consider a liberty. 'I must let him see I notices it,' she thought, 'or next I shall have him tramplin' in and out as bold as if he was aboard his own ship.'

'Who is it he's got with him?'

The brusque tone but added fuel to the landlady's fire.

'Oh, well, that he best knows hisself,' she answered loftily. She hadn't let her rooms for years to navy officers for nothing. No playing the spy on them through her. 'I run out to get my bits o' things in 'fore they was all tore to rags with the tremenjous wind that's blowin', and when I come back the door was ajar. Now you knows all I've got to tell 'ee.'

'Yes, but he went away in a coach, didn't he?'

The landlady was about to fence still more, but she thought this might be carrying matters rather far. 'Well, now I thinks of it,' she said, ''twas a coach, 'cos the young Doel ran up Stonehouse Hill way and hailed one.'

'And who went in it with him?'

'Not *you*,' she said emphatically, 'nor *me;* and that's 'bout enuff for they who should mind their own businesses to know. I ain't here to fetch and carry for nobody,' she added, with rising asperity, 'I lets my lodgings, and I lets my lodgers alone.'

A short experience had taught Roger that this lady's temper had best be let cool down. Early but active service in the bumboat line had made her equally proficient with her hands and her tongue. Her boast was now that, through her 'eart bein' wrong, and pushed over, out from its proper side, she'd settled down quiet and genteel'; but did opportunity require it, her masked talents were still ready for those who roused her anger.

'Oh, it's of no matter!' said Roger, forcing himself to keep calm; 'I only wanted to know if he'd be back soon or no.'

'He won't have his dinner home, if that's what you wants to know. He's goin' to the Port Admiral's; I heard him say so.'

'All right,' said Roger; 'you needn't to mention you've seen me. He won't ask; he fancies I'm gone on a message he sent me, and so I am, only I wants to be off on a bit of a spree.'

'Awh! it's that, is it?' and she gave a sympathetic wink towards him. 'Well, 'tis my belief *that* isn't far off what he's after. Like master, like man, 't seems to me.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

DUNCHY, Dunchy!

The one idea in Roger's mind was to reach the old man and wring from him every word he knew.

Back by the same road he went at the same break-neck speed, hardly stopping to take breath until he

reached the Barbican. Here he was obliged to wait for a boat; one was more than half across, but was not yet in. He moved restlessly from this place to that, too occupied to note anything beyond the fact that those he sought were not there.

'Spectin' anybody, mate?' said a man whose curiosity he had languidly aroused.

In an instant Roger's face and manner were imperturbable.

'No, not I,' he said, with indifference; 'only I'd got a friend comin' in a coach, and I wondered if they'd gone over or no.'

A friend in a coach suggesting nothing less than having a friend who found it perhaps difficult to keep his legs, the answer was made with confidence.

'No coach been down this ways, not—well, not since four this mornin', I may say, for that was 'bout the hour that seed me here. I ain't,' he added, after further reflection, 'seed nothin' not worthy o' observation, 'ceptin' 'twas a purty bit o' goods that rayther took my fancy.'

Roger's heart beat furiously.

'Ah,' he said, seemingly intent on kicking one of the several remnants of dropped fish that lay close by, 'your style, was she? And what's that like? How long ago did she go over?'

The man laughed at what he supposed to be Roger's anxiety to catch up with this fair one.

'Awh,' he said, 'there ain't no call for you to hurry; she's off and away by this time. But she

was a comely piece! Hair all dark and curly like—I likes dark-haired maidens—and a eye——' And he broke out into an old galley-fire song:

"'Oh, she had a dark and rollin' eye.'

Iss, and a tongue too, for I axed her if there was anythink I could do, and her says, "You can hold yer jaw," her says. But I didn't mind; I like 'em a bit spitish, particklerly spicy ones like she.'

Roger waited to hear no more. Without doubt that was Loyalty. Coming in a coach they would, to insure a better road, take a more circuitous way, and thus he had missed her.

'Jammed in a clench,' he muttered. And now what to do next? At all events cross the ferry, and while doing so, try to come to some further decision. Of course they would be gone. Evidently it was for her that that vile old wretch Dunchy was waiting. Still, he could not feel easy without going to make certain; and again he went along the bit of road, and climbed through the hedge-gap and up over the field, until he gained the spot by the Cliff from which he had seen the boat. It was gone. They had thus, he calculated, got pretty nigh on two hours' start of him.

Accustomed as most sailors are to go for many hours without food, the strain put upon Roger made him feel empty and faint. While these bodily exertions were being made, his mind was working with equal activity, and a thousand suggestions and

insinuations were being clamoured by as many demons. Their voices now seemed to grow louder than ever; every beat of his heart, every throb of his pulse, had a separate tongue.

'I must get something to eat,' he said, consulting a substantial silver watch, of which he was very proud. ''Twon't make much difference in the time; and go and see her I will, cost what it may.'

Standing back from the road he had passed the little wayside beer-house, to which he now returned, and asked if they had anything to give him in the shape of food.

'Well, not much,' the landlady said. 'There is biscuits, and butter and bread, but no meat. You be come on a banyan day.'

'The soft tack 'ull suit me best,' and he cut himself a substantial hunk of bread and butter. While devouring it, he inquired if they kept any spirits by them.

'Well,' said the landlady, with a knowing look, 'if you feels all-overish like, and wants a little gived 'ee, I can spare it out of a bottle I keeps for myself, and we'll tack it on to the bread and butter.'

Roger understood the dodge perfectly, and the way the want of license was evaded. He drank off one glass of spirit, and held it out to be refilled.

'This 'ull make number two, you know,' said the woman warningly.

'Don't you be afeard, mother,' said Roger confi-

dently, setting down the empty glass and preparing to pay; 'I ain't one as takes more than I knows to be good for me.'

And he spoke the truth. The food and stimulant had made a different man of him. He could walk now; his limbs felt steady. That mad rush of blood beating and surging all over his body had calmed down. As he went along, he felt able to think, and reflect what would be the best course to pursue with Loyalty. During the whole time, while all these suspicions were maddening him, love had never ceased to knock at his heart; and though Roger still refused to open the door to it, through a tiny chink he now listened to the passionate voice of the eloquent pleader.

Impulsive as she was, never trained or taught like other women, after all, was it not possible that some wild notion might have taken sudden possession of Loyalty?—some idea that if she saw Captain Hamlyn, knowing that when she was a child he had wished to benefit her, he might wish to do so still; in what way Roger failed to see, only that it was most likely to be some scheme concerning him. Or her grandfather—old Jake—he had not thought of him before; Heaven only knew into what scrapes that villainous old rascal might not fall. It was known, or at least more than guessed at, that he had used Loyalty as a go-between before; might not something of that sort be the case now, and Loyalty be sent to put the screw on the Captain? Oh, Love, mighty sorcerer,

by your enchantments suppositions look probable that at another time would not hold one single drop of water.

Already Roger was taking Loyalty to task, trying to assume a great show of anger towards her, pointing out, in the severest terms he could command, the unmaidenliness, the indiscretion, the boldness she had been guilty of; and in the midst of all this condemnation, and the indignation he meant to show, a sudden throb of his heart made him brush something from his eyes, as he realized the great burden that would be lifted from him if he found, as he now believed he should, that though he might have folly, imprudence, thoughtlessness to condemn, there was no worse evil to censure. Folly he could forgive, folly he could forget, and a click in his throat which caught his breath betrayed the tenderness he was ready to lavish on the transgressor.

Rapidly as he walked, by the time Roger reached that point of the Cliff from where Ferrers can be seen nestling below, the short winter afternoon was almost at an end. The light, grown dim, was fading away. Far out o'er the sea there stretched a short broken line of orange red, already being swallowed up in a sky inky and black.

Roger paused; he was looking at, without seeing, that which lay before him—trying to decide how he could best insure an interview with Loyalty. He did not wish to go to The Cot, neither, in his present frame of mind, had he any wish to encounter Dunchy,

who, he wished to recollect, was an old man. His mother, too, he particularly wanted to avoid. What was to be done? Roger's eyes roamed round in search of one of those boys, usually swarming everywhere, whom he could send with a message, asking Loyalty to come to the Shag Cliff, where he was waiting for her. The Cliff was close by; involuntarily he turned himself in its direction, and, caught by one of those phantasms which the great magician of our fancy creates for us, as he unconsciously moved along he saw himself and Loyalty already standing there together: his arms had enfolded her, his eyes were gazing into eyes that looked at him again, on his breast her head was leaned, and into his ears, with many a penitent sob and tear, she poured the confession of her mad adventure.

'Why, oh, I never!—Roger!'

Hey presto! vanish the vision, and in its stead there stood the sweet reality, Loyalty herself.

Until now, had Roger ever known how dearly he loved her? Surely not, surely not. Straining her to his heart, it was like the lost found, the dead come back to life again. Mingled with his love there was the great joy of thankfulness that he had found her here. What better proof could he have that all was right than this prompting in her to seek out their old trysting-place, the spot above all others sacred to their love? No, no, she was true to him, true!—how could he doubt her?'

'Why,' she began, the first to speak, 'if anybody

had put it to me who was the last I was looking to see, I should have said you, Roger.'

'And yet I finds you waiting here'; and while he spoke he kissed again her mouth, her eyes, her cheeks.

'Oh, but that ain't nothin' new'; and with a rapid glance Loyalty scanned her lover's face, apparently well satisfied with the expression she found there, for, assuming a coquettish air, she added, ''Twasn't to see you that I was come.'

'No?'

'No. Whenever I wants to think a bit, and set things fitty inside my head, I comes up here.'

'Oh!—and puts your shawl and bonnet on? It seems to me you're mighty smart to-day!' and he took hold of the skirt of her gown and held it up to show her.

Not having returned to The Cot, Loyalty was still dressed as she had been to go to Plymouth; all the finery she possessed she had put on her. The day had been such an exciting one that, instead of going home after leaving Dunchy, she had made her way up to the Shag Cliff, feeling that she wanted to recall and think over the various things Captain Hamlyn had told her. That there was the remotest chance of meeting Roger had never entered her mind; the Captain had positively said that he sent him out of the way. By 'out of the way' could he mean he had sent him home?—here?

'Smart!' she said, in answer to Roger's remark upon her, affecting the while to cast down her eyes

in a critical survey, so that she might think of something else to say—'ain't you always tellin' me that maidens can't be too careful in their looks to please you?'

'And was all this put on, then, only to please me?'

Loyalty made a cherry of her rosy lips.

'I didn't know as how I was goin' to see you,' she said, glancing coyly out of the corners of her eyes.

'Then 'twas to please somebody else—eh?'

The words came huskily, he could hardly command his voice; that terrible dread was clutching at his heart again.

'Roger!' she said reproachfully, and as she spoke she twined her arms round his neck, 'who else is there I've got to please but you? Do I care that' —and she gave a puff of breath that might have blown away a thistle-down—'for the value of what any other man thinks or says? and some of 'em talks up a lot o' nonsense to me.'

'And you listens to 'em?'

'Well, not bein' deaf, like poor old Dunchy, I'm forced to; but it all drops into one ear, to drop out o' t'other.'

Dunchy! That name was like a fresh spark dropped on a smouldering fire. Loyalty was still speaking, adding—

'But when you gives me any praise, Roger—and it don't come very often, you know—I drops it down into my heart o' hearts, where I keeps stored up all my love for you.'

But Roger was not listening. He had put the palm of one hand under her chin, turning her face up towards him, so that his eyes might devour each feature.

'Who was it made you so fair to look upon?' he said, as if the words were wrung from him. 'God, or the devil, I wonder?'

'Either way, you wouldn't have me differ'nt, would 'ee?' she asked, her face flushing with conscious pride of her great beauty. 'Like Phœbe Rowe'—and she swelled out her cheeks—'would 'ee rather see me?'

'If Phœbe Rowe was you, and you was she,' said Roger sternly, 'there might chance be a precious sight more happiness in store for us two.'

''Tis a pity you didn't think o' that before.' Phœbe Rowe's merit was a sore subject with Loyalty.

''Tain't never too late 'til after the ring's put on,' was Roger's reply. 'I ain't afeard of the answer she'll give me when I puts the question to her.' Not that he meant to say this; there was but one thought in his mind, the overwhelming desire that Loyalty should of her own accord, without any leading up to it from him, make free confession of where she had been that day, and what she had done.

'Oh, well,' she said, her quick generous heart ready to take blame to herself, 'us isn't up here to haggle about Phœbe Rowe; my mind was turned upon very differ'nt things when you comed on me so suddent like; I was thinkin''—and she hesitated—'thinkin' how when I did see 'ee I'd got somethin' to say.'

Roger's heart gave a bound—now it was coming, now he was going to hear; the little hesitation of speech, the casting down of the eyes, were proofs positive to Roger. He flung his arms round her, drew her to him.

'Yes, yes,' he said hurriedly. 'I'm listening; go on!'

'Oh!' and she gave a little nervous laugh, for it was of her grandfather's future she had intended speaking, 'I haven't not got anythink really to tell.'

Nothing to tell! It was as if a bullet had pierced Roger, and his tightened embrace was because he felt himself stagger and reel.

'I haven't been nowheres since you was here, and not done nothink.'

'No?' he managed to say—'what, not done nothin' to-day?'

Loyalty raised her eyes with a feeling of suspicion, but the expression in Roger's face banished every fear that her secret was in his possession. He was gazing at her with a look of passionate tenderness such as she had rarely, if ever, before seen. His whole soul was in his face as he added, 'Not been nowheres but here?'

'Nowheres.'

Except the regret that for the present she was forced to deceive him, the lie she told had no weight with Loyalty. She had been trained to mislead people, and put them on the wrong scent, and it had never occurred to her that any blame was

attached to so doing. Later on Roger would know all, and they would laugh together over how cleverly he had been bamboozled.

'Nowheres,' she repeated, resting her chin against his breast, while her limpid eyes looked into his, reflecting back all the love they saw there; 'and as for doin', would 'ee like I should show 'ee what the best thing is I've a-done all to-day? Well, 'tis this!' and, like the sting of a bee, she darted a kiss from her rosy lips on to his mouth.

It is said that in one flash of time we may recall a life's history. For a moment, barely more, Roger stood transfixed, looking at Loyalty, but in that moment he seemed to himself to see the siren that had him in her clutches.

What was he to do? Fly from her? Cast her off for ever?—or stay—stay to be enslaved fathoms deeper than before?

She was looking into his face—without moving his eyes he could see the shawl she had thrown off—the same one he had seen lying in the boat, when Dunchy was waiting for her—the lips she had just withdrawn from his had, he now believed, given their sweetness to another man—the love-light in her eyes had been kindled at the fire of his. What would he do? Would he stay? Would he go? Would he keep his self-respect, or lose it and himself in . . . He had given his answer. Loyalty was in his arms, struggling against a flood of passionate caresses such as Roger had never before given her.

'Roger! Roger!' she cried, freeing herself.

'What is it?' he said hoarsely.

'You frightens me.' Puckering her face into a half-smile, half-frown, she added, 'Whatever's come to 'ee? I never knowed 'ee like this before.'

'Because,' he said, with a harsh laugh, 'I never felt before as I do now.'

'No, Roger, no,' for he had thrown his arms round her again, 'you terrifies me, oh!—you hurts me.'

'Do I?' he said savagely, 'that's what I wants to. I wants to hurt you. If I could, I'd hug all the breath out of your body,' and his embrace tightened until she seemed held in a vice; 'then you could boast'—his hold had suddenly relaxed—'that you'd a sweetheart hung so well as a father.'

Loyalty gave a sharp cry. Never in all the years he had known her had she once heard that taunt from him.

Stung to the quick, she pushed him roughly aside, and took a few hasty steps as if to leave him. But in a moment the flush of anger passed. *He*, Roger, willingly pain her! Impossible! Never!

'Roger,' she said, turning back to where she had left him, 'Roger!'

He was gone! Loyalty saw him rushing at a mad helter-skelter along the Cliff.

'Roger!' she cried, 'Roger!'

But he did not stop.

'Roger, stay! I want you, Roger!'

But he went on.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT top speed, like one pursued or possessed, Roger ran on, never stopping to take breath, until from sheer exhaustion he flung himself down at the foot of the steep descent where stands the ancient church of Ferrers Bay.

There he lay, motionless, almost senseless, neither knowing nor caring where he was. Gradually the swish, swish of the sea came to his ears, then his eyes opened on the old gray tower beyond, with the tops of the standing tombstones showing white over the wall, and he wondered had any of those, resting there, ever gone through such anguish of soul as he was suffering then. He had half raised himself to look about, but the sickening sense of his misery coming over him again, he let himself fall, this time with his face turned towards the earth. And there he lay, the long roll of the waves as they washed in and back, sounding sometimes near, sometimes far off, growing fainter and fainter, until they seemed to stop.

Roger awoke; whether he had slept hours or minutes he did not know. He was cold, chilled to the bone, his limbs seemed stiff and frozen. With difficulty he got up, began beating himself with his crossed arms, and stamping on the ground with his feet.

A little animation restored, he tried to see the time; but it was too dark. For aught he knew it might be the middle of the night, and a shiver ran through him at the mere thought of any more lying on the ground. He would walk to get himself warm, but he was cold inside as well as out, and he began to recall a little inn not much out of the way leading into the Plymouth Road, where, if it was any reasonable hour, he might get something hot. Bodily suffering is a good balance to mental pain, and Roger hurrying along thought of little else but the probabilities of getting shelter. He was quite cheered to catch sight of the little twinkle of light in the window, and beyond measure surprised, on reaching the house and stepping in, to see by the clock it wanted nearly half an hour to seven.

He sat down by the fire and had a glass of hot grog brought to him, to find that his troubles had taken a seat by his side. Again he went over all that he had gone through during the day, and everything that was black looked still blacker.

The casual looker-in would have seen but a young man with a glass before him and a spoon in his hand, with which he was turning round and round a piece of unmelted sugar. But to Roger's eyes the glass was a whirlpool, and the bit of sugar was himself being eddied, engulfed, sucked down to destruction.

Since his meeting with Loyalty, all confidence and trust in himself was gone—the two Rogers were alive in him again, and the one loathed and despised the

other. As each in turn got uppermost he made his voice heard, one insisting on immediate flight, running off at once to sea—anything so as to put the distance of the poles between Loyalty and him; the other urging a love which could not be overcome, blaming, censuring, upbraiding, but blinding his eyes all the time.

These thoughts, now vague, now taking shape, surged and went whirling through his mind until, abandoned by hope, his body seemed to succumb in sympathy, his legs slid out, he sank lower in his chair, his arms fell by his sides, his hands thrust themselves into the depths of his pockets. One of them came in contact with something there, something which it seemed unconsciously, to him, to draw out and hold up to his sight. With a half-stupefied gaze Roger recognised the letter, which the stirring events of the day had caused to slip his memory.

'But a few hours ago!' Good Heavens, what a time it seemed since it had been given to him to deliver; and, certain links rapidly fastening themselves together, it flashed into his mind, what had it to do with the deception played upon him? Roger had been all his life a trustworthy man, and for his station he held a very exalted idea of honour, but in the twinkling of an eye he had torn open that letter and was reading—

'DEAR CHARLEY,

'A favour to ask of you.—Will you contrive something to keep the bearer, my man Coode, kick-

ing his heels about for an hour or so? I want him out of the way, and can hit on no other means of getting rid of him. When you think he has been kept long enough, scribble a line for him to bring back to

'Your old chum,

'CARLETON HAMLYN.'

Roger's teeth ground themselves together as he read this note over and over again, each time finding in it a fresh insult, another sting. The immeasurable distance the writer saw between himself and 'my man Coode,' who was to be kept 'kicking his heels about,' made Roger writhe again. 'I want him out of the way,' he read. 'Out of the way!—out of the way!' he repeated. Already Roger had gone through the agony of picturing two he saw together; but he had been spared until now listening to their making merry over him—laughing, jeering at the poor bamboozled fellow, who was sent off to be kept 'kicking his heels about,' because they wanted him 'out of the way.'

With his elbows planted on the table, his nails dug into his lips, his eyes strained upon the paper, he plucked out every word, to brand it separately on his immortal soul, and, having reached the bitter end, he slowly rose, and, standing, asked God to bear him witness that that night before he slept—if ever sleep should come to him again—he'd seek some woman out, and asking her to be his wife, set

an insuperable barrier between him and Loyalty for ever. Unconsciously he said these words aloud, so that the woman of the house came from the opposite room.

'I thought you was callin',' she said, 'or speakin' to somebody?'

'No,' said Roger, 'there's been nobody here.'

'I'm certain,' she said, 'I heard talkin' goin' on.'

'Oh, very like it was me. I often find I've been sayin' something aloud to myself.'

'Poor soul!' she said compassionately, 'you must be hard up for company.'

Roger smiled grimly. 'Ah, well,' he said, 'I'm goin' where I shall get better company now; so I'll pay my score, missis, and get on my way.'

The landlady told him what he owed her, and Roger took his leave, she coming to the door to look after him.

'That's right,' she said. 'I'm glad he's gone up and took the road: somehow, looking queer like he does, I didn't like the thoughts of his goin' along by the sea.'

The road Roger had taken led to the destination he had in his mind—Greentree. It was there he was going, to see Phœbe Rowe, to ask her to marry him.

He walked on swiftly, with head erect and eyes looking forward, like a man with a fixed, settled purpose. Only at the top of the little ascent, where the clump of trees which hide the house from view became visible, he stopped to smooth out his face,

to pull himself together, and to assume as much as possible the aspect of a wooer.

Accidentally fortune was going to favour Roger; one of the fowls had got astray, and Phœbe had come out to look for it.

From the midst of the trees, with her apron over her head, and the straggler under her arm, she darted out to fall almost into the arms of Roger, who had as suddenly turned round.

Of course Phœbe said 'Oh my!' because it never occurred to her to say anything else; and the person near making a snatch at her, she said 'Oh my!' again, this time adding, 'he'd better say who it was, or she'd give a scream.'

'Why, you know, Phœbe. Now don't tell me you didn't see it was me.'

'What, Roger! Oh my! Well, I never.'

'Never what?' he said, profiting by the darkness—thankful it hid his face from her—to throw his arm round her waist.

'Roger, for shame! Be quiet, do! I wonders at you. I should like to know what Loyalty George 'ud say.'

'Should you?' he said, with a short, hard laugh. 'Well, that don't matter to me; but what does matter is a question I've come to put to you, to which you'll have to give me yes or no.'

Like a dried-up nut in its shell, Phœbe's cramped little heart rattled in her bosom.

'I'm sure, Roger,' she said, 'I don't know a bit

in the world what 'tis you means, but you'd better step inside. Father ain't there now, but 'twon't be long 'fore he will be.'

While saying this she led the way indoors, and Roger followed her.

Within the kitchen a fire was burning, its flickering flame giving enough light to show, standing on the table, a recently blown-out candle. To this Phœbe extended her hand.

'''Tis dark,' she said, 'but I'll get a light in a minute.'

'No, no,' said Roger, 'don't. No candle's needed for what I want to say, Phœbe,' and he held her by the arm. 'Come, you can guess my errand, I know, so I shan't go tackin' and fillin' and beatin' about, but come straight to the point. What do you say? Will you marry me?'

'Roger! Oh my!' And then a suspicion dawning in her mind, she added sharply: 'I don't believe you means it. You's somehow makin' game o' me.'

'All right, bring me a Bible, and I'll take oath 'pon it, that if you'll have me, I'll marry you.'

Phœbe felt relieved; she gave a little foolish laugh. 'Oh!' she said, bridling; 'well, I don't know, you must give me time.'

'No, now, that's just what I won't do; 'tis now or never with me. I ain't goin' to be kept dilly-dallyin'. If you won't take me at once, I must try and find somebody else who will, or else off I go to sea. It's all a toss up.'

'Bless my heart, what a hurry you'm in!' she said to him; saying to herself, 'They's had a rumpus, that's what 'tis, him and she, and to spite her, he's come to offer hisself to me.' Her heart swelled out to its utmost size in hatred of Loyalty and Roger too. But vindictiveness was the lord of that little breast, and as long as she got him, what need she care? 'Once married,' she thought, 'and we'll see: before now I've knowed the cock to be outcrowed by the hen.'

Roger had by this time put his arm round her waist, jerking her towards him as though he had hold of a log of wood. Even that small show of affection made him wince. He could talk, say, put into words his resolve, but the thought of an endearment made him shudder. Still, it had to be done, and he must get up steam somehow.

'Of course you know,' Phœbe was saying, 'there's father to be thought of?'

'Oh, d—— father,' said Roger.

This irreverent speech seemed to tickle Phœbe; she began to giggle. 'And there's Mrs. Coode—whatever does she say? She's been very stand off o' late with me.'

'Come, now, that's fishin'. You knows that she's always looked for you to be her daughter-in-law. What d'ye say? On with yer headgear, and come along down with me and tell her she's to wish us joy.'

That was indeed a long-desired wish of Phœbe's; the prospect made her round blue eyes open wider.

'I'm sure,' she said, hanging her head with affected coyness, 'I wish to be directed right in what answer I gives you, Roger. I knows you to be what you are—a upright, professin', God-fearin' man.'

'Here, hold on there!' said Roger hastily; 'none o' that's needed for the marriage lines. If you'll have me, Phœbe, I'll tell you what I'll be—as good a husband as I can make to you. It shan't be my fault, knowin'ly, if ever you repents of havin' married me.'

Phœbe sidled up closer to him, took up her apron and wiped the corner of one eye; with the other she glanced up invitingly at Roger. He saw what was expected of him, and stooped down and kissed her, if that could be called a kiss which was only a loud smacking of lips against each other.

'Then that clenches the bargain,' he said, lifting his head. Phœbe gave a lackadaisical look of assent. 'Now on with the bonnet, and off we go.'

'I shan't be a minute fetchin' it,' and she moved to go from the room, Roger following close behind, standing at the foot of the stairs, calling after her not to be long. Phœbe gave a satisfied smile at this lover-like impatience, which meant with Roger his dread of being alone. He was afraid of himself; he did not want to think, to consider; had he known of the Waters of Lethe he would have bartered his soul in exchange for a draught of them.

Outside the gate of the little garden Phœbe proposed they should go by the road which led to Bridge

End, over the stile, and through the fields which overhang the lake-like water. It was a walk much favoured by lovers, where most of the maidens—for in Ferrers they took the initiative in courting—were in the habit of taking their young men.

She was disappointed that he did not, in Ferrers fashion, walk with his arm round her waist; and her soliloquy as she trotted a few paces behind, unable to keep up with his long strides, was, 'Only you wait, and I'll tell 'ee 'bout strammin' along and leavin' me to do the best I can.'

Even the stiles—placed, one would say, especially for the purpose—he would not linger over, and not until they reached the straggling line of houses did he do more than say yes or no to her questions. But the sight of open doors and occasional standers at them revived his attentions, and he then began calling her Phœbe, nudging her arm, pushing her along, and going through other forms of lover-like horseplay.

Arrived at his mother's door, he knocked with his fist as if he would beat it in, flung it open, and burst into the little sitting-room, pulling Phœbe after him.

'Hallo, old lady!' he called out; 'didn't you wonder who was here? I've brought a fresh visitor to see you. There, wish joy to yer daughter-in-law,' and he pushed Phœbe over very much as he might have done a bale of goods.

'Why, Roger! what, Phœbe is it?' exclaimed Mrs. Coode, startled out of her senses by the racket and noise.

'Phœbe, mother, Phœbe. Wish us joy, the two of us. I'm goin' to have the banns read out by Sunday. Here, is it too late to go and tell the parson now?'

Phœbe, who was trying to straighten into shape her bonnet, which she declared was 'bowed all sorts of ways,' thought it high time she spoke with authority.

'Roger,' she said, 'how ridicklous you are. Be quiet, do! Whatever will your mother think?'

''Tis past thinkin' o' anythin' with me,' said Mrs. Coode, 'while this distractin' uproar's kep' up. Roger,' she said severely, 'what is the meanin' of it? I desire to have a answer gived me.'

'The meanin' is that Phœbe and me has settled it to drop down to one anchor, mother. Come now, haven't you bin always at me to bring home somebody who could step into your shoes? Well, won't they fit her? You'm hard to please, old lady.'

'Not in the matter o' Phœbe I ain't,' said Mrs. Coode, looking at her son with a motherly eye of scrutiny. 'Only at my time o' life, this bein' took unawares is tryin'. I ain't what I used to be.' She was still looking at Roger, whose thoughts for a minute had flown far away. His face seemed to unglue itself and fall back into an expression of utter helpless misery. He raised his eyes, to catch his mother's eyes fixed on him. He was up like one stung, moving here and there, stumbling over, upsetting things, pushing Phœbe about, until it was all Mrs. Coode could do to keep her temper.

As for Phœbe, much better pleased with this

riotous devil-may-care sailor than with the usual glum silent Roger, she kept up one continuous giggle.

'Oh, my dear Phœbe,' exclaimed Mrs. Coode, her patience at length giving way, 'do for gracious goodness' sake stop that foolish laughter; and as for you, Roger, sit still for one five minutes if you can. I don't know whatever's come over 'ee. You'm like a parched pea in a shovel jumpin' up and down. Now, leave that cupboard alone,' for Roger had opened its little glass door, 'or if there's anythink you want out of it tell me.'

'Only lookin' to see if I could spy anything to wet my whistle with.'

'It seems to me,' said Mrs. Coode, 'that you've been doin' that pretty free already.'

'No, that I haven't; you're wrong there, mother. I'm ready to walk a deck seam with anybody. I did, feelin' cold as I come along, go in and order a glass of hot grog, but I left half of it not drank on the table.'

'I call that actin' foolish, then. You might ha' drunk what you'd paid for.'

'I forgot all about it 'til now; wantin' another drop put me in mind of it.'

Mrs. Coode got up and went half-way across to the cupboard. Stopping, she looked at Roger.

'Why not wait till you'm goin' to bed. 'Twill do 'ee worlds more good; and I 'spects Phœbe won't want to stay much longer; it's close on the strike of nine now.'

After such a broad hint Phœbe got up.

'No,' she hurriedly answered; 'as 'tis, father 'ull be wondering what's comed o' me.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Roger disappointedly; 'I was goin' to ever so many places yet.'

'At this time o' night?' said his mother. 'Why, what for?'

'To tell they around 'bout me and Phœbe. I want folks to know——'

'Oh tine-a-by!' said Mrs. Coode sharply. 'Don't you fear; folks 'ull know soon enough. Phœbe's only got to tell her two aunts, as 'tis natural she's bounden to do; and she knows, same as I, that that and givin' a shillin' to the town-crier's one and the same thing.'

'Oh, Mrs. Coode, I don't see the call for your sayin' that!' said Phœbe huffily. She might as well begin as she meant to go on; and one of her pleasant anticipations in marrying Roger was the prospect of quarrelling with his mother. 'Others can use their tongues so well as Aunt Tishy and Aunt Tabby.'

'You needn't tell me that, my dear,' retorted the old body; 'and others, too, that belongs to the same family. Come, Roger,' and she turned to her son, 'if it's you to see Phœbe home, don't keep her all night waitin'.'

Roger started and looked round, as if recalling to himself where he was.

'All right, Phœbe, here I am. Catch tight hold; don't let go o' me.'

'Good-night, Mrs. Coode,' said Phœbe. 'You haven't a-wished us joy, you know.' She had been preparing this as a parting stab.

'Don't be nonsensical, Phœbe; there's no need to say what everyone must know. Next I shall be told that I'm to make strangers of my own flesh and blood.'

The door closed; they were gone; in a few minutes their voices and Phœbe's foolish laughter died away.

'Wish them joy!' she ejaculated. No; that was beyond her power. In place of it, she heaved a deep-drawn sigh. What she had hoped for, prayed for all these years, had come to pass; and she did not feel a whit more happy than she had when she believed Roger was courting Loyalty. True, the bitterness of heart then felt was no longer there; but, instead, was a withering contempt for Phœbe, and a dread that her foolishness should prove contagious to Roger.

'Lord,' she said, 'we are but vessels of clay. Thou knowest what to give, and what withhold, far better than us.'

Mrs. Coode in her generation was not singular in believing that the Almighty was concerned with all the trivialities of her daily life. She considered that between herself and heaven a telegraph was established, and her interests drooped or flourished according to God's smile or frown. She was still magnanimously engaged in insisting that the Creator's judgment surpassed her own, when her son rushed breathlessly in.

'Why, Roger,' she said, raising her eyes to the

clock, amazed to see how short a time he had been away; 'why, you must have flown up the hill, and drove Phœbe afore you. Didn't you stop to speak to Mr. Rowe?'

'No; I ran back as quick as ever I could—I wanted to be indoors again.'

'Well, sit down now, and let me have a little reasonable talk with 'ee.'

The coldness of the past two months had gone. Believing all was not going smooth with him, her mother-love was in arms to give comfort to her child.

He sat down as if worn out and thankful for rest; but the next minute he was at the window, looking out

'Oh, there was the spirits and water you was goin' to have;' and Mrs. Coode bustled up, hoping that might make him more settled and perhaps loosen his tongue. Bringing in the kettle, she said, as she placed it on the fire, 'How the wind's risin'! Just step out to foredoor, Roger, and see to what quarter 't 'as changed.'

Roger did as she desired him; he was gone, perhaps, a minute or two—long enough for Mrs. Coode to sit down again.

Suddenly, the whole house shook with the violent slam of the door. The key in it was turned, and with it in his hand Roger rushed back into the room. For an instant he stood panting, gasping for breath, like an animal driven to bay. Flinging the key towards her, he cried—

'Mother, hide it away. Keep the door locked.

Keep me in. Don't leave me! Don't let me stir out of here; there's murder in my heart. I shall go mad—I shall go mad!' And he flung himself prone on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXV

'AFTER night cometh day, after a storm cometh a calm.'

These words rose to Mrs. Coode's mind as, the next morning, Roger came into the room where the breakfast was set out.

To the casual eye he looked very much as he always did, but the mother could see that his face was pinched and drawn, his features set, his mouth hardened. When he spoke, the broken notes of his voice of the previous evening had given place to a dull monotone, in which he made short, cut and dry answers to his mother's questions and remarks.

The night before, when after so suddenly breaking down Roger had recovered his senses, Mrs. Coode had tried her very utmost to draw from him the occasion of his distress, but not a word of information would he give her. She asked him about Loyalty, but could get no reply. After saying that everything was at an end between them, and he free to offer himself to Phœbe, he refused any more mention of her name. Also—growing soon regretful of that outburst of emotion which had so suddenly mastered him—he tried to put his mother off, and to

soothe her anxiety by saying he didn't know what the reason was for his feeling so queer in the head; he'd been first up, then down all the day, a night's rest would no doubt set everything straight again.

Trusting he would endeavour to get this rest, Mrs. Coode feigned to accept his explanations, and the mother and son had retired at a late hour to their separate rooms, each bent on deceiving the other.

Roger to wait until he fancied his mother must be asleep, and then, his boots being off, up and down, up and down he paced, the whole night through, the hours being dragged out to a double length by the care he had to take not to let any noise disturb her.

She, listening in her bed, her breath held, her ears strained, torn by a thousand anxious fears, with but one comfort—the key of the house door was under her pillow.

'Why, you'm down betimes, Roger,' she said. 'I thought after bein' up so late you'd very like lie it out this mornin'.'

'I've got to get back to Dock. Walk so quick as I may, I sha'n't be there too soon.'

Mrs. Coode gave a little side glance.

'I dessay,' she said, 'that old Rowe will be 'spectin' to see you.'

'Rowe! What about?'

'Why, my dear, have you forgot 'bout Phœbe? 'Tis only proper that you should speak to un: be what he may, he's her father.'

'I can't help that,' he said roughly. Then,

seeming to better recollect himself, he added, 'You can do that, or else I will, when I come over again.'

'All right, so long as 'tis done. And when do 'ee think that 'll be—that I shall see 'ee?'

'I can't tell, no how. There's no answerin' for he'—and he intimated by a nod that it was Captain Hamlyn he meant—'any time he might take it in his head to want a sail.'

'Oh, well, if he takes it in his head to-day, I should say he was wantin' a swim; anyhow,' she added, glancing through the window at the flying scud of the sky, ''tis what he'd be most like to get, wantin' it or no. I can't abide that nasty, crank, razor-keeled *Racer*. I allays maintains that Rowe built her to be a coffin to somebody. Many a anxious moment has she cost me.'

Roger smiled grimly. 'I don't know,' he said; 'it might happen worse than to be buried at Rowe's expense.'

'Oh, don't 'ee, my dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Coode superstitiously. 'I can't never suffer to hear no jokes cut with life and death; 'tis too serious a matter for them whose breath is but in their nostrils to speak slightin'ly of.'

'Is it? We've all got to go, so what odds? How, when, or where don't seem to matter much to me.'

'Roger!' Mrs. Coode began severely—'and you brought up religious, too!'

'There, there,' he said quickly, 'I don't want to say anythin' to anger you, mother. I'm off now!'

—he stood hesitating, as if trying to recollect something more he wanted to say, Mrs. Coode looking at him with expectancy. 'Good-bye, mother!' and he turned away.

'Roger,' she cried, seeing he was going, 'wait a minute; I've got a word to say to 'ee.'

'You must say it another time,' he said, without looking round. 'I can't stop now;' and he walked quickly on.

He had reached the end of the Lees, and was going down the break-neck steps which have to be descended ere the little rill, which higher up will swell into a goodly stream, can be crossed, and the opposite hill, leading to the Cliffs, mounted, when to his surprise, from behind a jutting-out tree, he saw Jake George coming towards him. With a message from Loyalty, could it be? The thought did not make Roger's heart beat any more quickly. Emotion, feeling of any sort, seemed dead in him.

'I's a been casting about on the watch here for ever so long,' began Jake, in his gruff, hoarse voice. 'I's been wantin' to get sight o' you, lad.'

'What for?' said Roger briefly.

'That slip o' paper you got handed you come from me.'

Roger made no reply.

'You got it give to you, eh?'

'Yes.'

'Ah!'—and he gave a growl of satisfaction—'he to board us in the smoke; but I got put on

his scent—I had her tracked and watched. She went to where he told her to—oh! 'tain't the fust time they's held their meetin's, not by many.'

'How do *you* know?'

'How! Why, by what she's told me. She ain't kept it a secret from me. They was for talkin' me over, so that he might come to Cot, which,' and he clutched his trembling old hands, 'he durstn't to, for fear o' me now.'

'You're tellin' me a lie,' said Roger, knowing that nothing like fear would keep Carleton Hamlyn back from anything on which he had set his desire.

'It ain't a lie,' said the old man surlily. 'Only last night she told me the offers he'd made, wantin' her to live with un; and, failin' that, he's goin' to offer a good sum to you.'

For the first time that morning Roger felt himself alive. A rush of hot blood seemed to surge through him, and back again. 'By the God who made him,' he said, lifting his arm on high, 'if he does, the words shall as surely launch him into eternity as the blow he got swung your son!'

'Spoke like a man,' said Jake; 'only I can't be baulked of what I've hoarded up for years. No, lad, no; you must leave him to me.'

'To you!' Roger exclaimed, noticing for the first time the alteration in the old man's looks—the bent back—the sunken-forward head—the weakness shown in the totter of the legs. 'There's only one arm, 'tis true; but the strength he's left with would make you

naught to him but that!'—and he plucked a withered twig and snapped it.

George tried hard to speak, but the anguish of feeling that what Roger said was true made the tears, lately so ready to come, drop one after the other quickly from his eyes; he nodded his head, and gave vent to a choking sob.

'There, there,' said Roger, touched by the distress of the weakened man, 'don't make no concern of that. What matter who does it, so long as 'tis done? I'm young, and strong, and willin'"; and he gave a harsh, joyless 'Ha, ha,' which George tried to echo, but which ended in another sob.

'There's only one thing I'm sorry can't be done,' continued Roger, as if speaking to himself.

'What's that?' gasped George, hoping it might be something that he could help him in.

'That we can't settle him—and she looking on.'

'Why not?' cried the old man eagerly. 'Why not 'tice him out to Cot? He's told her he'll come any time she sends for him. Oh, she's got but to hold her finger up.'

'No,' said Roger, 'no takin' him to Cot for me. If he proves the truth o' what you tells me, overboard with him I jumps, and down we goes like lead.'

'What! you, too, Roger? No.'

'No! Why not? What's there for me to live for, eh? To garnish a gallows out to Devil's Point? —served like Charley Macgraw—

'Who died by the law,
Was hung three times, and drownded once.'

'Twill be t'other ways on with me. I can find courage for the drowndin', but not for Jack Ketch.'

'Well, then,' cried Jake, with a horrible oath, 'she shan't live to tell no tales of ye. Only you get him into the Bay, and give the signal to me; and so soon as I've showed you to her I'll send her straight to meet un down below.'

Involuntarily Roger gave a gasp.

'Oh, don't fear,' said the half-maddened old wretch, mistaking the sound for distrust of his power; 'I'll find the strength to do that. There's a spot where with the weight of a finger yer balance is lost, and good deep water all round it, too. Ha! and she'll find there's company down there—some as has been missed, run away to sea, or gone off nobody knows where.'

The horrible picture given made Roger's senses reel, and yet he was conscious that a thrill of joy ran through him at the thought of not leaving Loyalty to the love of any other man.

'Hold there!' he said roughly, giving Jake a shake by the arm, and looking with an ominous frown into his face; 'no wild talk of that sort to me. Not a finger on a hair of her head, mind ye. Do you hear?'

A growl was the answer.

'And as for what's bin said about *him*,' continued Roger, 'I've got yet to prove it true, and by the Almighty it won't be well for you unless I do it.'

'I've gived ye pretty nigh word for word what last night she gived to me,' said George surlily.

Roger stood for a moment as if lost in thought.

'How came you to know I was home here?' he said. 'Was that from her talk?'

Jake nodded his head. 'Yes, and she said as how her heart died with fear when you close-questioned her 'bout where she'd bin, and what she'd been up to all the day.'

Roger kept back the words that rushed to his lips, and only hissed them between his teeth; but, unable to keep himself entirely in control, he gripped the old wretch's shoulder and shook him as if he had been a dog. 'Oh, you've turned out a bird of your own hatchin',' he said, letting sudden go of his hold, so that Jake reeled back into the thicket of gorse and butcher's broom, which saved him from falling to the ground. 'Curse her! curse her! curse her! curse the two of you!'

He was gone, and when Jake staggered to his feet he saw that Roger had already crossed the narrow stream and was zigzagging up the steep ascent, which spreads out on top into a grassy knoll, once over which he was lost to sight. Then the viperous old wretch drew back into the shelter of his covert, gloating over the seeds of vengeance he had sown out of the cunning of his weakened, half-crazed brain.

It was true that much that he had said to Roger —distorting it so that it should serve his end— Loyalty had on the previous night said to him.

Returning to The Cot, moved, perplexed, excited

by emotions which had been newly called forth, the sight of the old man, sitting there lonely and broken down, had touched a fresh spring in her. Carleton Hamlyn had implored her, if ever she saw an opportunity, to entreat for him the forgiveness of her grandfather, whose reticence and careful guarding of his daughter's name had left on him a deep impression. What better chance would there ever be than the one Loyalty saw then before her? 'If,' she thought, 'I don't seize it soon, he'll be past, poor old soul! accordin' forgiveness to anybody.' And on that she had spoken, and, carried away by the, to her, unlooked-for and most wonderful circumstances, she had detailed the interview with the Captain, very nearly as it took place—how he had offered to provide for 'you grandfer, so well as me.' The old man's hands were clenched and clenched again at the insult of such an offer flung at him. 'And when I told un,' she said, 'that though you'd never breathed a word to me, you'd learnt the truth from out her dyin' lips, his heart was pierced, to see how he'd belied 'ee, thinkin' if you so much as guessed the truth, you'd ha' surely sucked un like any leech would.'

There was a rattle in the old man's parched throat.

'He wanted to settle down a sum o' money, so as we should allays be independent like, with no call to work, and have a home, but I told un, No. I knew you wouldn't touch it, and so with me; I wouldn't be beholden to un any ways.'

Her grandfather did not speak. Looking, Loyalty

saw his head had fallen on his breast. 'I wonders has he heard one word?' she thought. The bent head slightly moved; and in the hope that some part, however slight, of what she had said might reach him, she added:

'The knowledge of all the wrongs he's heaped 'pon you, and she, and he, and me, has brought un very low at times, grandfer; and though, he says, 'tis all these years gone by, the thoughts of it never rises 'fore un now, but he feels forced to hang his head.'

There was a scraping of the seat—Loyalty looked; her grandfather had shifted his position; he had raised his head and was looking at her.

'What's it he offers to do for *you?*' he said, looking away before she gave the answer.

'Oh,' she said, with a little laugh, 'nothin' that makes the vally of a feather's weight with me. What's fine clothes, and livin', and sight-seein', and that—iss, and bein' called his daughter too—he put that in, and said I might tell you so—to me as holds in my keepin' Roger's love, and has been gived his promise that I'm to be his wedded wife?'

She was holding her head erect, her lovely face flushed with exultant pride.

'I reckon you've let out the truth to Roger, haven't ee?'

'Oh, grandfer,' she said in reproach, 'didn't I give to 'ee my solemn oath never to breathe one word to nobody? No; and I've seed un too—since

I came back here; and when he axed so innicent like what I'd been up to all the day, my heart fairly died away to think I was deceivin' un.'

There was a pause, and then, as if struck by something fresh, she said, as if speaking to herself now:

'I hopes that he'll be led by what I said, and not go pressin' gifts on Roger. It hurts me; 'tis like payin' un to marry me.'

There was a shuffling of the old man's feet; his legs suddenly shot out so as to leave him more fallen together on his seat. Anxiously looking at him, Loyalty saw his eyes were shut, and after watching for a minute, she concluded he had fallen asleep.

'H'm,' she sighed; 'I can't help feelin' pity for un, feeble and old! 'Tis what I s'pose us all must come to;' and she tried to picture herself and Roger white-headed, tottering together down life's hill; and she smiled—so impossible to youth is it that age will ever come;—and with the smile upon her lips she gently tiptoed, and stooping her head to clear it of the low-linteled door, standing outside on the flattened ledge of rock she looked around, wondering would Roger think it too late for her to go to the Cliff again. So many of their meetings were curtailed now by his anxiety that she should keep the proper hours that other women kept. On her way home—after Roger had so abruptly left her—she had seen Dunchy, and, without betraying her lover, had told the final circumstance to him.

'Lors, what's in that?' the old fellow had said

contemptuously. 'What can 'ee make out of it? Here, you'll have to battle the watch from mornin' till night if you'm goin' to hold on by every word that's said. I knows exactly how 'twas. He just let the "hang" slip, and then was ready for to bite his awn tongue out. Samé's happened to me scores o' times, only I hadn't got his gumption to cut and run for 't, and so got my head pretty nigh knocked off. Hikey, Jo! what a fist her'd got—she I was sweet on, I means. I've told 'ee before, haven't I, 'bout her bein' Nickie Glubb's sister? They *was* females in that family; there was spirit enough in one to serve out to a whole ship's company.'

As usual, Dunchy's salve had soothed Loyalty; she felt assured that it was so—that Roger was ashamed, feeling he had wounded her; he would tell her so when they met again. And in the contented mood she was in, this certainty had grown on her; and also there had grown a feeling of maidenly reserve such as she had not felt before—a something that made her draw back from seeking Roger, and, while standing in front of The Cot looking in the direction of their trysting-place, she said it was he who ought to come to her, and she sighed, 'Oh, that he would come!'

The sky was dark, but the stars, thickly set in it, shone brightly overhead. She could see Charles' Wain with the two pointers twinkling at her, telling of the pole-star, emblem of every sailor's love.

All day the wind, still rising, had been high, and

as the bulging waves came rolling in, they were crested with white foam, which, nearing the shore, they cast from them, so that some of it was blown on Loyalty, and shaking it from her like a happy child, she laughed aloud.

In the day she had gone through, there had been much to stir her, much to give her pleasure.

Carleton Hamlyn had a winning manner that few women could withstand, and much that was in him struck an answering chord in Loyalty. Emotional and full of feeling, every bit of which he let you see, this interview with his daughter had drawn forth from him proposals, promises, offers of sacrifice, perfectly sincere at the time, which could not fail to soften her. The firmer she was in refusing these, the greater treasure he felt he was losing in her, until he finally wept, saying that he was fully punished for his sin, by his child refusing to acknowledge him; and then, in hopes of further moving her, he spoke of Anne, how he had loved, how he still loved her, but that for years he had not found the heart to tell her so, and now after so long he lacked the courage to explain.

Going back to, and going over, all that had been said, this about Miss Anne lingered most in Loyalty's mind. If but in some way she could help to join them—that angel friend and *him* to whom, even to herself, she did not give a name—what happiness to them, to her, and to Roger, who would now soon know all; and, raising her swimming eyes to that

good God so bountiful to her, out from her great full heart she offered something from her store of bliss—which given to them should make them one.

CHAPTER XXXVI

LEAVING Jake George, Roger walked swiftly on. Strange to say, he neither pondered over nor made plans about the resolve he had just taken. That numbness which for a short time had given way to terrible rage had come back and was gradually creeping over him again.

It is a mistake to suppose that momentous action must always be prefaced by grave introspection. Roger, although firmly decided, under given circumstances, to take his own life and the life of a fellow-creature, was perfectly callous and unconscious of any great difference in his feelings then and those he had had during the many times he had walked that road before.

The people he met spoke to him, and he returned their greetings, in some instances stopping to give more than a passing word.

He even went out of his way to call at a certain shop in Exeter Street, where the previous week he had left a small silver buckle to be mended, and which had been promised him on that day.

'You've come for what I ha'n't got to give 'ee,' said the man.

'You told me that by to-day you'd have it all ready for me.'

'Iss, and I told 'ee a lie, which I don't care to do, unknowin'ly. But you come next Monday, and I promise 'ee, if you and me is spared, that here he'll be.'

'And s'pose we ain't spared?' said Roger, quite cheerily.

'Well, if 'tis me is tooked, you'll get un all the same; and if 'tis you?'

'Keep un. I sha'n't want un.'

The man laughed. 'Mind, 'tis a bargain, that!' he called out; and then repeated, '"Keep un. I sha'n't want un." He ain't a bad chap, that, by no means; only in gener'l he's so mumchance. He can take a joke, though, if 'tis put before un. I'll get his buckle done, no fear.'

This little bit of business finished, Roger pursued his way up Catte Street through Plymouth to Stonehouse, over the Bridge, and on to Baker's Place. This time, remembering to knock at the door, the landlady met him in a more genial mood.

'Oh, so here you be; shown up at last?'

'Yes,' said Roger; 'come to report myself again. Any orders for me?'

She shook her head. 'Not that I know by.' Then, jerking with her thumb towards the sitting-room upstairs, occupied by Captain Hamlyn: ''Tis all dicky with I to-day,' she said, and she hung lackadaisically on one side her fat head, endangering

by so doing her cap, with its erection of many-hued ribbons and flowers.

'Oh!' said Roger, giving a snort of contempt; 'I thought he was in such full feather yesterday?'

'All the more reason for their's bein' rumped up now. 'Tis the way with you men,' she said, with withering scorn, 'one and all of 'ee. If you happens to carry y'r years well, you thinks you'm as young as you'd like to be. Well, *he* finds he ain't,' and she drew down her brows conclusively; 'and if he takes advice of me, which he'll get free, gratis, for nothin', and without the askin', he'll jine hisself in wedlock with some easy-goin', middle-aged lady, and leave the gammucksin' with young maidens to they that's suited to 'em.'

'Meanin',' said Roger quickly, 'they such as *she* he'd got here yesterday?'

'No; I've no meanin' for *she* more than another one. *She* may be anybody you likes to name for anythin' I can gainsay. All I knows is they was very lovin' in their talk together. I overheard 'im tell her he felt like a father to her from the minute he cast eyes 'pon her.'

'Oh, did he?' said Roger. Then, leaning eagerly towards her, he added, 'Was you able to get a good sight of the two together, eh?'

'Was I able to what?' she said, taking sudden umbrage at the question. 'Upon my word! The next thing I shall be axed is, was I sat squat on the mat with my eye to the keyhole o' the door! I've

heerd o' impidence, and come across a little of it, too, in my time, but 'twas left 'til I see you, young man, for to feel the full weight of it come 'pon me.'

Her voice, rising with her anger, seemed to have caught Captain Hamlyn's ear, for the upper door opened, and he called out—

'Coode! Is that Coode I hear below?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Step up, then.'

It was now that Roger felt the tingle of his blood go through him; at the bare thought of standing in the presence of this man his hands worked so that he found the impress of his fingers on the stiff brim of his hat.

For a minute he could not find voice to give his morning salutation, and the Captain, noting some slight embarrassment, while wondering at its cause, said—

'You've a letter for me, Coode, haven't you?'

'A letter, sir?' stammered Roger.

'Why, yes; the answer from Captain Chambers, to one I sent him yesterday.'

Roger hadn't thought of that before. He cast about him for some ready lie which might serve as an excuse.

'I hope you'll look it over, sir,' he said, and his unusual hesitation made what he was inventing seem more real; 'but I managed somehow to get into a bit of a scrimmage yesterday, and your letter was

lost. Well, I may so well out with the whole of it—got somehow pitched into the fire.'

'My letter?—Captain Chambers' letter, I suppose you mean?'

'No, sir; the one you gived me.'

'You didn't go? Then what became of you all day?' He said this quickly, and as quickly Roger had an answer ready, saying to himself while giving it, 'What an inventor was the father of lies!'

'Well, sir, you see I made a start, and then it was in this way. The *Royal Charlotte's* bein' paid off, and I happen to have two or three old chums in her, and so——'

'Yes, yes, I understand'—he was only too pleased to hear that the letter, which it would have been awkward to explain, had never reached its destination; 'we won't say any more about it, Coode, unless you want a billet as one of those twopenny postmen, and then I can give you a leg up, by telling how well you delivered my letter for me.'

Roger did not smile, which the Captain was not surprised at, believing him overwhelmed by the indiscretion he had committed. And thinking this a favourable opportunity for introducing a proposition he was anxious to make, he began moving about the room, as if in search of something—a way he had if there was any embarrassing or painful matter to touch upon.

'A kind of last fling, Coode, I suppose, yesterday was?'

'Sir?'

'Why, you're going to get married, ain't you?'

Roger felt as if every drop of blood in his body had rushed into his head and face.

The Captain, looking at him, thought, 'Lord, how sheepish all these fellows are! I wonder how they behave to the women they want to marry them?' Aloud he said—

'And to the grand-daughter'—and here he stopped to take a long breath, as if he was speaking with difficulty—'of old Jake George, they tell me?'

'Who tells you?' said Roger sternly.

'Oh, it doesn't matter how I heard it; but you see I know. Loyalty—isn't it Loyalty her name is?'

'Loyalty George is the name she goes by. Her mother's married name was Kellow, but through the husband being hung Loyalty is called George, same as the grandfather.'

'Bless the fellow,' thought the Captain, 'how unpleasantly digressive he is! I wish, too, he wouldn't keep his eye glued on me in that way. I suppose he thinks I'm meddling with what I've no concern in. Poor Loyalty! poor child! he's not the husband I'd have given your sweet self to.' And a dart of anguish went through him; with the bringing up he could have given her, and the education, she might have married someone he would have had pride in calling son.

'Yes, I know—of course; and it is about that painful episode, Coode, I want to speak; indeed, it

was that which made me enter on this subject with you.' He was turning over and over a paper-knife, uneasily conscious still of Roger's eyes being fixed on him.

'It is needless,' he continued, 'to go back to past details; no doubt they are all known to you; and also you may know that it was my wish to do something to benefit those that were left. But the prejudice, obstinacy—call it what you will—of the old man prevented me. Well, to come to the long and the short of the matter, what I wanted to do then, I want to do now; and so, Coode, you must accept, as a favour to me, a marriage portion with the wife you're going to take, which I shall have the pleasure of thinking will enable you to start in life comfortably.'

He looked up saying this, and the expression on Roger's face was so strange that he involuntarily asked, 'You're taking in good part, I hope, what I'm offering?'

'Quite, sir,' said Roger. 'I give you full credit for everything you mean.'

'That's right, then; we understand each other.'

'I quite understand you, sir,' said Roger; 'and later on you'll see how my gratitude's shown for it.'

The Captain had jumped up from the chair in which he had been sitting.

'Oh, it's no question of gratitude,' he said hastily. 'All I need is the certainty you'll make her happy. She's a good girl, and you are a fortunate fellow.'

Then, fearing he had said too much, he added, as he passed out into the adjoining room: 'Every fellow is fortunate who gets the love of a good girl. Oof!' he said, finding himself alone; 'thank Heaven that's over. It's as hard as a court-martial. I felt that eye fixed on me, turning me inside out and sifting me, as if I'd been an empty bread-bag. I wonder what he's heard? Nice stories, I expect! That is what I can never find out—the amount of feeling there is against me in the villages. Anne says, none; but then, if she thought it would hurt my feelings, she wouldn't tell me. Bless her! she wouldn't hurt the feelings of a fly.'

And he sat for some minutes lost in meditation, to presently give another hopeless sigh, and say, 'It's of no use, it can never be. If beating the bounds with that fellow there should so completely bowl me over, how could I stir up the whole of the miserable story and spread it out before Anne? Ah!' he sighed bitterly, 'how little can we tell. Some men's follies pass them by, others, like mine, spring on their necks and sit there like the old man of the sea. Farewell, Anne—farewell.'

Returning to the sitting-room, to his surprise he found Roger standing as he had left him, with eyes fixed and immovable.

'Why, Coode, my good fellow, are you still waiting?'

Roger seemed to drag himself back to where he was. 'I—you—I've not, sir, had my orders from you yet.'

'Bless my soul, no more you have! Not that I've

any to give you, Coode. I'm out of sorts to-day—only fit for the sick list—not worth a ninepin.'

'Why not go for a sail, sir? There's just a nice capful of wind.'

'The very thing of all others I should enjoy; but I'm not able to—to-morrow, now——'

'There's never no answerin' for to-morrow,' said Roger disappointedly. 'No time like the present, sir.'

'It can't be, Coode, it can't be. I'm steward to this ball that's coming off, and there's a committee meeting at three; it wouldn't do for me to be absent—it would put everyone out. It does not strike me that there's likely to be any great change in the weather, unless it is the wind is rising still. Come up to-morrow, and we'll settle the time.'

'Then I'm to take it for granted you'll go, sir?'

'Yes, I want to prove that *Racer;* and if the wind keeps in this quarter it will be a good opportunity.'

Roger saw he was dismissed—he took his departure, grimly smiling over the idea uppermost in his mind—the Captain planning, arranging for a ball which he would never take part in. He felt quite a sympathy with the rest of those concerned, for the Captain was known to be a great dancing man.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ALTHOUGH Loyalty had reasoned herself into remaining at home on the previous night, the following morning she was all anxiety to know what had become of Roger.

Old George was nowhere to be seen, but in that there was no cause for uneasiness—night and day were not marked by any fixed routine by him. He slept whenever he had a chance, and did what he had to do when it best suited him. For many months past most of the labour inside The Cot and out on the beach had fallen entirely to Loyalty's share. Her grandfather's strength was gradually failing him, and any manual labour had become impossible. Finding things done, he did not inquire who had done them, and the burden thus laid on Loyalty day by day became heavier.

Dunchy had given her a promise that he would be on the watch to see whether Roger had returned to Dock or had gone back home to his mother. If he had spent the night at home, Loyalty felt certain that Dunchy would have a message for her. The morning usually calmed down Roger's outbursts of temper, and a word or two left with Dunchy to deliver was a recognised sign between them. Loyalty was conscious of an unusual heaviness of heart which she could not banish from her, and in the midst of labours which taxed her young strength to its utmost, she would start to find that she had stopped in what she was doing and was lost in reverie. Sometimes her thoughts ran on her marriage, the home she would have, and where it would be. And her eyes would fill with tears as she unconsciously stretched out her arms, feeling that the cliffs, the rocks, the sea must share the pain the thought of leaving them gave her.

'I reckon most folks would count me mazed,' she sighed, 'if they did but know how I feels towards all o' this about. When it comes to me I'm goin' from 'em for good and all, I could kiss each inch o' stone, each blade o' grass; and as for the water there, that I've talked to, and cried to, and listened to, and played with—oh!'—and the quick shower of blinding tears told more than any words could say.

Roger could not understand this, any more than he understood how it jarred on Loyalty to hear him rejoice that she would soon be away from this outlandish sort of home, and parted from the idle vagabond set that hung about there. At these times such a deep gulf opened out to separate her from Roger, that it took all Loyalty's love to build the bridge by which she reached his side again.

Twelve o'clock had struck before she was able to set off to see Dunchy. Then, having reached the narrow path which skirted the coast, she hesitated. Should she take that, or climb the still steeper ascent over which, on the night when Roger had returned from sea, she had gone to keep watch for him?

Inclination decided in favour of the latter way; and, hardly pausing to draw breath, Loyalty soon found herself at the top. Here she halted, looking down on Mrs. Coode's neat cottage, better seen now that the trees were bare.

Would the doors of that house ever be opened to welcome her? Roger still believed that his mother was coming round—Loyalty heaved a sigh.

'Oh,' she said, 'if she did but know how I longs for a kind word from her, she'd never keep her heart shut so tight against me as it is now. Why, what is there I wouldn't do, knowin' her for Roger's mother?'

Roger's name bringing her back to the errand she had set out for, she began making her way through the thick-growing gorse, brambles, and bushes, which still make the covert for many a fat fox.

Passing the clumps of butcher's broom, which Loyalty called skiver-timber, she stopped, attracted by its large red berries, to pick some sprigs. Close by its side the holly stood, bright with ruddy glory; but holly was sacred until Christmas-eve, when, with the first leaf picked, you tried, by its prickles, to find out if your sweetheart was true. Loyalty had often tested Roger's fidelity, and it had never failed.

The little bunch she was making of the brown sprigs, mixing it with the golden-leafed ivy clinging round and clothing the bare trees, she intended to give to Mrs. Hockaday, to whom she planned paying a visit on her way home. Mrs. Hockaday loved flowers, and had been the first, Loyalty believed, to draw her attention to them; and her gratitude was shown in always, if possible, finding some little blossom to take with her to her sick friend. 'It ain't the same, though, goin' to see her now,' she thought, hurrying down towards the ferry. 'I feels every time it brings back Ned to her mind. Stupid fellow! behavin' so foolish. It wouldn't matter if it didn't wring his mother's heart as it do.'

At the top of the slip she began announcing her advent by calling 'Over, over!' and then, getting nearer, 'Dunchy, Dunchy!'—but no answer came. She searched through the cottage, but he was not there. Bending over, so as to get a look under the projecting rock, she saw the two boats run in, and in one some freshly-used fishing gear.

'Tish! he's off with his old fish,' she said irritably; and then, reproving herself, she added: 'Not that I've any call to grudge un earnin' a few pence. Of late I've known what 'tis to be hard put. So far, grandfer's had his fill; but many days there's been plenty o' slack about me.'

Old George's weakened strength and failing memory made him of little service now, added to which the outlook kept by the cutters had been for many months so sharp, that there was seldom a chance of the free-traders doing much business. If George had a hoard put by, he kept the secret from Loyalty, who, in addition to her other cares, began to feel anxious how he was to be provided for.

Leaving the two wooden stools turned one upon the other—a sign agreed between them to let Dunchy know that she had been there—Loyalty took her way towards the Cat and Fiddle. She meant to return later on, but it would be of no use doing so for some little time, experience telling her that poor Dunchy had often many a weary mile to go before he could dispose of his burden. Mrs. Hockaday she knew would be pleased to see her. 'And now,' she

said to herself, 'that Roger's gived me leave, I shall begin about Ned, and try if talkin' of un won't in some way ease her mind.'

And so successful was this remedy, that poor Mrs. Hockaday at length declared herself better than she'd been for weeks before. 'You always had the art of cheerin' me, Loyalty,' she said, seeing the girl get up to go; 'and I haven't anythin' to give 'ee in return, unless you cares to know Miss Anne's come back.'

'Oh, the blessed dear!' cried Loyalty with enthusiasm. 'I *am* glad. I dearly loves Miss Anne. When she's away the place don't never seem the same.'

'That's true. She only come last night; but this mornin' down she was—hearin' how ill I'd been, so that they never looked for me to live 'til now.'

'Oh!' said Loyalty sympathetically, 'you mustn't talk like that. You'll get better yet—you see.'

The sick woman shook her head. 'No,' she said; 'and I ain't so much for livin' now. To be took don't seem to me what once it did. See at the months I've laid here! Why, even Hockaday's resigned that I should go; 'tis such an awful drawback to a business like this, he says.'

'Oh!' said Loyalty huffily, 'I shouldn't study that, I'm sure. We ain't axed when we'd like to come into the world, and, when 'tis ordained, we's got to go out; so I don't see what call there is to hurry anybody. I think Mr. Hockaday might bide 'til your proper time's come.'

'Ah, well, Loyalty; there's one I know will miss me when I'm gone.'

Loyalty squeezed the hand she held, knowing that Mrs. Hockaday meant her.

'And if we never meets again,' and the poor drawn face was held up to the girl's fresh rosy one, 'we shall meet one day in heaven, shan't we?'

Loyalty hesitated, and then half-bashfully she said—

'Do 'ee feel, then, like as if you was goin' there?'

'Oh, I don't know; I scarce dare venture to say "Yes"; only Mr. Yabsley gives me such hope.'

'Why I asked is—if so—there might be a chance for me.'

'For you? Oh, Loyalty!'

'Iss, iss, I know,' for the look conveyed its meaning to her. 'When the devil got to you he was seed by everybody. With most of us when he comes, and come he do, we has un on the sly.'

And having kissed her friend once more, they said 'Good-bye' and parted; Loyalty going away sorrowful, fearing it might be, as Mrs. Hockaday had said, she would never see her face again.

Outside she paused. It was of little use going to the Ferry yet. 'And 'tis a dismal place,' she said, 'to sit waitin' to.' Why not go along round by Bridge End, and over that way? By so doing there was the chance of meeting Miss Anne. This possibility was quite enough to decide Loyalty; and she set off to go by that way.

Now, it happened that Mrs. Coode had felt very uneasy all the morning, recalling the strange behaviour of her son; and so greatly had this anxiety preyed upon her that, unable to bear it, she had resolved to seek some advice from Miss Anne. The news of the little lady's arrival had reached her that morning, and, her dinner over, she dressed herself in her Sunday best—her idea of showing your betters proper respect—and set out for Ferrers House. Arrived there, she was told that Miss Anne was out; she had driven to Plymstock, perhaps would go on to Plymouth; the servant could not say at what hour she would be back. Disappointed, there was nothing for Mrs. Coode but to retrace her steps—not back by the road though, where, if she met people, it was to hear again of Phœbe Rowe and her son Roger. 'Poor boy!' she thought, 'he needn't have flurried hisself about folks not knowin'; you'd think her must ha' gone round the two parishes with a bell. I never heerd the like; only last night—and 'tis in the mouths of everyone.'

Mrs. Coode was right. Phœbe, wise in her generation, had felt that the best way of securing Roger, and making any drawing back impossible, was to tell the news to everybody; and she had not let the grass grow under her feet in so doing.

Down the little lane, through the gate, and across the fields which lead from Ferrers House on to the Cliffs, Mrs. Coode had come. Now there was the steep descent to be made, which she assured herself

was ever so much worse than it used to be—'it fairly made her head swim round, this keep on goin' down'; and, pausing to recover, she saw below, coming up towards her, the one who had been so greatly in her thoughts that day—Loyalty George. It was a long time since Mrs. Coode had seen Loyalty, and the lovely face, flushed and beaming, struck her afresh by its marvellous beauty. In a twinkling she had set alongside it the poor pudding-face of Phœbe, and, forgetting her platitudes about 'potter's clay,' she shook her head, telling herself it wasn't possible for the heart of man to hesitate in its choice between those two.

Not moving, a minute more brought Loyalty close up to her. Startled, the girl drew back, as if not knowing what to do; but Mrs. Coode had made her decision: she had elected to find out from Loyalty what was the cause of rupture between her and Roger.

'Well, Loyalty,' she began, ''tis a long time now since you and me was brought face to face with each other.'

The tone was not unkind. It was as Roger said; his mother was coming round. Loyalty blushed, hesitated, and finally stretched out her hand.

Mrs. Coode accepted it. 'It sha'n't be said of me,' and she gave a self-satisfied smile, 'that I ever refused the olive-branch, whether held out by youth or age.'

With a very imperfect notion as to this metaphor of olive-branch which Mrs. Coode was using, Loyalty

took refuge in another blush and smile. Roger had told her that his mother knew how matters were between them, and that they were to be married soon; she, therefore, need not hesitate to speak to her about him.

'I 'spects, Mrs. Coode,' she began, a little nervously, 'that you'd got Roger home last night. I s'pose he went again this mornin'?'

Loyalty wished that her heart wouldn't keep up such a thumping, and her face not get so red; it made her seem so foolish before Roger's mother.

'If you'm meanin' by Roger, my son,' said Mrs. Coode condescendingly, 'he did go this morning. Why?'

'Oh, only that,' Loyalty was a trifle chilled by 'Roger, my son,' given in Mrs. Coode's old way, 'when last evenin' he left me he didn't seem quite to know.'

'Last evenin'? Was he with you last evenin'?'

'Yes'; and now it was Loyalty's turn to say 'Why?'

'Oh, for nothin''; and then, feeling it was best at once to plunge into deep water, she added, 'Only, if so, what I've got to tell can't be news to you.'

Loyalty did not speak, but her face asked what the news was.

'You'd have heard from hisself that 'tis settled, everythin' 'tween him and Phœbe Rowe, and that their banns will be called on Sunday.'

All that rich blood which had mantled Loyalty's

face, swift as it had mounted up, now rushed back again, leaving temples, cheeks, lips, white as any lily. She groped with her hands, as if trying to lay hold of something that evaded her; and then, in a quick voiceless whisper, gasped out 'Phœbe Rowe! Phœbe Rowe!'

Mrs. Coode's heart smote her. Taking hold of one of the hands, already cold as stone, she said—

'I 'sposed—I thought that you know'd—that he'd told 'ee.'

'Tell me again,' said Loyalty; 'tell me again.' And then she muttered to herself, 'Banns up on Sunday, *on Sunday*'; repeating in the louder tone, 'Tell me again, I say, what you said just now.' And this she continued until Mrs. Coode said—

''Twas Roger himself told me. He brought down Phœbe for me to wish 'em joy. Last evenin' the two of 'em come down together.'

Loyalty's large dark eyes kept fixed on Mrs. Coode until they seemed to grow twice their usual size, then, as if the full meaning of the truth had burst on her, she raised her arms and let her hands fall open on her head.

'My God,' she cried, 'I've lost him!' and she fell motionless at the widow's feet.

'Loyalty,' and Mrs. Coode bent down over her, chafing the cold hands, and moving her so that she might raise the white face—'Loyalty, open your eyes. 'Tis me, my dear; don't 'ee know?—me, Roger's mother.'

The drawn lips quivered, the eyelids trembled, and then opened, and the eyes of the stricken girl looked at Mrs. Coode. 'Roger's mother?' she repeated.

'Iss, that's right,' for Loyalty had raised herself, and was leaning on one arm.

'Come, now, try and reason with yourself a bit.'

'Reason!' she said, 'reason!'

'Why, there must ha' been some reason for Roger to have broke with you and gone and straight took up with Phœbe Rowe. Men doesn't act that ways, Loyalty, without a cause. Come, ask yourself now, have 'ee been playin' un false in any ways?'—the thought of Ned Hockaday was in Mrs. Coode's mind —'keepin' back, hidin' anythin' from un?'

'Me false to Roger!'

'Awh, my dear, there's bin women as bright as you false to men as bright as my son. I know Roger, and what he is. Rue it he might, but he wouldn't never go to cast you off unless he'd some just cause for doin' so.'

Loyalty shook her head, and, sitting, swayed herself to and fro, every now and then passing her hand across her brow as if to make something more clear, muttering all the time, 'Phœbe Rowe!—banns up on Sunday!—Phœbe Rowe!'

Mrs. Coode looked at her, consciously stirred by the great magic of the girl's beauty. The head, now bent, now thrown back, showed the sweet curves of neck and throat—the bonnet, fallen off, let the hair escape and add a charm by its disorder—the droop-

ing lids, first with their dark fringe resting upon her cheek, and then lifted up, disclosed those wondrous eyes, whose melting sadness seemed to pierce the widow's heart.

For an instant Mrs. Coode was sensible of a feeling akin to contempt for any man who could forego this being so divinely fashioned, and place in her stead podgy, pasty-faced Phœbe Rowe. The next instant, however, the thought that this man was Roger—her son—impelled her to make an effort to break the spell.

'You don't need me to tell you, Loyalty,' she began with severity, 'that I was never the one to show favour to any marryin' between you and Roger: from the outset I kept the same face turned against it that I did up to the last moment. Nevertheless, in spite o' that and much more, which might well have baulked the fancy of a far more ordinary man, Roger was willin' to give up all and everythin' for you. Chances, offers, made with beggin's and prayin's that don't fall to the lot of many, he treated as chaff before the wind, 'til at last it come to Mr. Rowe axin' for un to be *partners* with un!' Saying this, Mrs. Coode paused; surely Loyalty would give some sign of surprise. But no; she continued to rock herself as before. Evidently to pierce her the arrow must be sharper barbed. 'And,' added Mrs. Coode, 'though such a offer ain't more than he deserves, 'tis more than for any maid's sake you could expect a man to say *No* to. The Lord be praised, the whole o' what's inside us ain't flesh and blood.

There's lofty thoughts, and high motives; and later judgment often stands condemned at the sight of youthful folly.'

The widow was constrained to fall back upon platitudes, as unintelligible to herself as to Loyalty, who with eyes now fixed was staring at her blankly.

Stunned by the crushing blow she had received, the girl was obliged to repeat again and again each fresh piece of evidence, fixing one by one the words in her mind, struggling by an effort to grasp their meaning. Suddenly the whole truth of Mrs. Coode's communication seemed to flash upon her. She gave vent to a sharp cry, which seemed to cause her pain, for she put her hand over her heart and kept it pressed there.

'Oh, Roger, Roger,' she moaned, 'to hold me in your arms, to strain me to your heart, and know that all the whiles you'd gived yourself to Phœbe Rowe!'

The reproach of her lament seemed to find an echo in the mother's heart. She could find no word to say of comfort or of censure.

'I can't stop here no longer. I'll go,' said Loyalty, making an effort to struggle to her feet.

With far more tenderness than her speech and manner had implied, Mrs. Coode put her arms round the girl and assisted her to rise. Little could Loyalty guess that in the heart of her ancient enemy there was the impulse to clasp her to her breast, and let her there sob out the sorrow that every word and look betrayed.

The bond of love is a wonderful union, and the mother, whose whole being was centred in her son, recognised the presence of a passion as all-absorbing as her own.

While giving support to Loyalty's still trembling frame, Mrs. Coode with the hand that was free pulled into order the girl's disarranged gown, and set straight the handkerchief which had escaped from her bodice, Loyalty, as if mechanically, permitting all these cares to be bestowed on her. Then, with a touch almost caressing, she smoothed the stray locks of hair.

'There,' she said, looking at the white face, grief-stained and quivering; 'now where's your bonnet to? Us 'ull put un on, and——'

But with a quick movement of impatience Loyalty freed herself.

'No,' she said harshly, for the widow was already stooping to pick the bonnet up from the ground; 'let un be.'

'Let un be!' repeated Mrs. Coode, not comprehending that the bonnet, scrupulously worn, out of Roger's wish that she should never be seen abroad without one, was to Loyalty the symbol of that respectability which was the cause of her desertion. 'But you can't go roamin' the place over without no bonnet on your head! What 'ud people think of 'ee?'

'Think!' she said—and in a flash the whole face seemed lighted by a flame—'think! What do I

care what you or anybody thinks? Not go about without I've a bonnet on my head? There! there! there!' and she stamped with such fury on the hapless bonnet that it lay flattened and half sunk into the short damp grass.

'Oh, fie, fie!' cried Mrs. Coode, brought back to her artificial self by an action which outraged all the laws of her training; 'that's givin' way, Loyalty, to nothin' but temper.'

'Temper!' she said, and the voice though distinct came in a whisper—'if you could see the devil I've got in here!' and with her pointed finger she tapped her bosom—'if instead of that bonnet there'—and down went her foot again—'I could only feel 'twas the false heart and body of your son, I'd thank the Lord I was born to see this day!'

Terror-stricken by this sudden change, Mrs. Coode involuntarily shrunk back.

'Oh, don't you fear,' she added, with withering contempt, 'I ain't goin' to lay a finger on you. Go home to him you've brought up to beg and pray for maiden's love, and then turn that love to hate by castin' it away. Who led him first to think about Rowe?—*You*. Who's always sowed the mischief 'twixt he and me?—*You*. Who never let un rest for lies of me you hoped was true?—*You*. Well,' she said, moving her hand with a gesture of dismissal, 'go back home; your work's over now. All you said I was you'll find me, and wuss, too. And the pair of 'ee, go sit in your chapel with your noses

turned up, and Phœbe Rowe atwixt the two; and when you chances to pass me by, say 'Look to she—what her is, us made her,' and take what comfort that 'ull bring your two false hearts when you lies stretched upon the bed o' death. And as for Roger!' —and with arms stretched up and eyes lifted to Heaven, she cried, 'May the God who made him send down every——'

But Mrs. Coode's hand was already over her mouth. The face, the gesture, the attitude of inspired vengeance, smote her with superstitious awe; she felt the fire of an avenging Deity must come in answer to that call. 'Loyalty!' she cried, 'spare him! spare him! spare him!'

'For what? 'Cos o' the sparin's I've had from both of 'ee? Ha! ha!' and her laugh was as a rasp in the widow's ear; 'when I thinks that I was strivin' to make my ways like yourn, takin' for gospel truth that they who'd tidy homes, and sat and sewed, and went about with bonnets on their heads, was angels such as I should like to be;—gettin' to hold what *he*,' with insufferable scorn, 'was for ever drummin' in my head, that sinners such as Mrs. Hockaday, a-dyin' there, wasn't fit for decent women to go near—*his mother* wouldn't put foot inside her doors;—"low, bad drunkard," as you called her, 'tis to she I owes whatever good there's in me. The only hands that was held out to help me clear of sins that never comed your way was hers and Dunchy's! Iss, I know—"evil-livin',

cheatin' old vagabond," you calls him. Well, he's my other friend, the only one there's left me now to take my sorrow to, and ask counsel how I best can bear it.'

'You frightens me,' faltered Mrs. Coode, and in truth every limb in her body was trembling; 'I'm terrified by the evil things you've said, Loyalty, and the language you've used.'

'Then listen to the rest I've got to say.' And catching her by the arm, Mrs. Coode was shaken by the violence of that paroxysm of passion which, like a tornado, seemed to sweep through the girl's whole being.

With a cry of entreaty she freed herself, and forced her fingers into her ears; but though Loyalty had turned and was flying up the Cliff like one possessed, the wind seemed to bring back the torrent of words which still rung in Mrs. Coode's dulled ears.

By an effort she at length began her way back home, haunted as she went by two faces, which seemed to press on either side of her. Here, Loyalty, pale, corpse-like, stricken as if by death; there, maddened, infuriated, as one distraught through grief.

What if the desperate girl should seek to end her life? Mrs. Coode's trembling knees refused their support; she had to catch at a bush to prevent herself falling. Whom could she speak to? Whom could she ask to look after her? Dunchy—Loyalty had spoken of him, and Mrs. Coode remembered

having seen him earlier in the afternoon pass her window. As quickly as she could she hurried along the Lees, and coming suddenly on one of the numerous Ryder family, she asked had he seen the old deaf Dunchy about that way.

'He's 'long to 'Lisbeth Yeo's, if he ain't got across the Voss by now,' said the boy.

'Then you off so fast as can, and tell un that Loyalty George is up top o' Cliff and her wants un.'

Away ran Watty Ryder at top speed, to return some five minutes later and say that Dunchy had already crossed the Voss on his way home. 'Shall I go after un?'

'Yes,' said the widow. 'And if you catches un up, and says what I told 'ee, and that I think she's took bad, when you comes back I'll see if I can't find 'ee a ha'penny.' And Mrs. Coode turned into her house and sat down on the nearest chair to recover herself.

There was a chill at her heart, a sense of oppression, of humiliation. It was as if she had been brought face to face with an accusing angel who had lain things to her charge which she never knew.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DUNCHY, returning from a more weary tramp than usual, when, according to him, 'They hadn't only wanted the fish gived 'em for nothin', but also to be paid for takin' of 'em,' had his ears saluted by the united voices of the young Ryders, assisted by a

select company, screaming 'Dunchy, us wants 'ee! —Dunchy!'

Dunchy resolved to take no notice. There was a very open feud between 'them raskilly Ryder boys' and Dunchy.

Finding, however, that his disregard of them increased rather than damped their ardour, he stopped and made a feint of picking up a good-sized stone, and then it was that his dulled ears caught the sound of 'Loyalty—Loyalty George.'

Seeing that his attention was arrested, the Master Ryder to whose care Mrs. Coode had entrusted the message, feeling that the importance of his office demanded something from him, advanced, and in the shrillest of trebles announced the fact that 'Loyalty George was up 'pon top o' Cliff seeking him.'

'You be——' and the stone was raised with such apparently murderous design as to send the band flying off. But only for an instant; the next their courage had returned, and they found voice to add, 'Her told us to tell 'ee so.'

Dunchy's answer to this was a growl; and he turned and went on, only to find himself still pursued. It was of no use; he might as well stop and listen to what they had to say.

'I hears yer hollerin',' he said; 'Loyalty George is up top o' Cliff seekin' o' *me*. All right. Her's there, and I'm here; will that plaze 'ee?'

'Her's took bad,' said the principal speaker.

'And I's took wuss,' was Dunchy's answer. He

was tired, hungry, and cold, and his temper was not in good order.

'*Mrs. Coode* said us was to tell 'ee.'

'Mrs. Coode! Awh, drabbit the women!'

But in contradiction of what he was saying, struck by the name of Mrs. Coode, Dunchy anxiously turned over in his mind, could Loyalty want him? Was she ill? And how did Mrs. Coode come to know about her?

Suddenly becoming aware that the small crowd, gradually drawn nearer, had all their twinkling eyes fixed with expectancy on him, he roared at them like a dragon: 'Did her tell 'ee to stand stock-still, starin', ye young gawpuses, lookin' for all the world like a row o' pussers' shirts stuck up on handspikes? Now you be off, I say!'—and this coming with an alteration in the voice, which seemed to imply that Dunchy's patience was at an end, the whole party, with shouts of derision, took to their heels and fled.

'Awh!' said the old fellow, with a grunt of satisfaction; 'now, then, I should like to know if there's a ha'porth o' truth in any o' that there?—I can't help it, anyhows. I ain't fit to stir a inch further to-night, anywheres'; and he went tramping on, still wondering about Mrs. Coode, and how had she got mixed up in any way with Loyalty. Inside his cottage—a light struck—he looked around. There stood the two stools, their seats together.

'Her's been here, then,' he said, 'for sure;' and he set the stools straight, and sat down on one of them. No, it was of no use, he could not remain. Thinking

it might be true that Loyalty was wanting him, weary as he was he started up, opened the cupboard —as bare as Mother Hubbard's—gave a shrug at its emptiness, and then drew from his pocket a greatly diminished roll of tobacco, cut himself a quid, and with no greater stay to his poor empty stomach went out to look for his boat. The little dingey he would take, not the great ferry tub; you were forced to row sharp in the dingey—and Dunchy felt he should need some impetus—'or else the water comed in through her strained planks so that you was swimmin' as you sat.' And, in the hope that if Loyalty was expecting him, she would come down to that part of the shore he was most likely to go to, he commenced shouting 'Oyez, Oyez!'—the name she had called herself by, when a little one.

But he could catch no answering sound; the echo that the Cliffs gave back did not pierce his ears.

'Awh, well!' he said, drawing up the boat to a safe position, 'I s'pose 'tis in for a penny in for a pound'; and grumbling over the weary stiffness of his poor old legs, he began to mount the Cliff, taking his way towards the Shag Cliff, where, if she was on top, he was most likely to find her. 'Here, I say!' he called out, only recovering himself by a stagger from being tripped up over something lying on the ground; 'what is it, eh?'

The light was quite faded, and Dunchy had to stop before seeing it was a prostrate figure—not an altogether uncommon sight in Ferrars. 'Hallo! What

cheer, my hearty?' And he was about to give a rousing shake, when he cried, 'Lord, why—iss, 'tis —'tis she, Loyalty! Whatever's happened? Loyalty! Loyalty!'

He was kneeling, calling her name into her ear. She was lying face downwards on the grass motionless, as one dead. 'The sense is clane knocked out of her,' he said, striving to lift her, and by so doing getting sight of her bloodless face; 'her's struck for death.'

To reassure him Loyalty opened her eyes, and freeing herself, she got up without further assistance. The boon of insensibility had been denied her. There, where, in her hot anger flying from Mrs. Coode, she had flung herself down, Dunchy had found her. The fire of that anger was burnt very low; its fierceness seemed to have consumed all her strength and power. Her lips moved, but no sound from them reached Dunchy.

'Oh, Lord,' he groaned, 'lend me my hearin' for a little whiles, so as I may catch what 'tis her's wantin' of me.'

The anguish of the old man's voice roused Loyalty. Trying to fan the embers of her wrath into a second blaze, she cried out 'Roger!'

The shrill over-pitched tone conveyed more than the mere name to Dunchy, and he anxiously answered, 'Iss, Roger. What o' he?'

'He's throwed me off,' she cried, trying to bring back the indignation and excitement she had felt

before Mrs. Coode. 'I'm flung aside for Phœbe Rowe; the banns is put up, they'm to be called Sunday.'

'It's a lie!' roared the old man, 'and so I'd tell to whoever told 'ee.'

''Twas his mother,' she said fiercely. 'Rowe's made un partners with un, and they've throwed Phœbe in as a make-weight; and last night she was took down that th' ole woman might wish 'em joy—joy!' she cried, clenching her raised hands and shaking them; while Dunchy, dumfoundered, taken aback, stood without finding a word to say. He hated Mrs. Coode with all his heart, but to doubt her truthfulness was impossible. In both villages and for miles around, wherever she was known, that Mrs. Coode said so, meant that a fact was past contesting.

'Joy,' she repeated, 'for them two! Do 'ee hear?'

An almost imperceptible nod gave his reply.

'Then what do 'ee stand for, never speakin' a word? Why don't 'ee join me in callin' down 'pon un every evil wish you knows? Why don't 'ee say with me'—and she repeated some of the imprecations which had curdled Mrs. Coode's blood—but in the very midst, with the words on her lips, there came a sudden breakdown. As from the smitten rock the waters gushed out, so burst forth the torrent of her tears; and, flinging herself on the old man's neck, she let her grief have its way.

The instincts of his nature told Dunchy that for such sorrow silence was the surest sympathy. Down

his own furrowed cheek a tear went slowly trickling. His horny hand stroked and patted the back of the sorrowing girl, gently as a mother might strive to soothe her child.

'Take me away, take me away,' at length he heard her moan, 'anywheres, so I'm got out o' sight of 'em all. I can't keep it up any longer—my heart's broke in two—all I wants is to be hid away and let to die.'

'Iss, I knows'; and with his jacket-sleeve Dunchy cleared away the dimness in his eyes. 'And if so be what you tells me was truth, 'twould be the best thing could happen to 'ee. But I've got to learn yet more o' this business, Loyalty, than I've heerd from you. What about yesterday? How much 'as that got to do with what's bin told to 'ee? How does us know but where's you went to, and he you went to see, has got to Roger's ears?'

'I've thought o' that,' she sobbed; 'but no. Not when he met me he didn't know, he couldn't have kep' it up; there ain't nothin' double about Roger. He's open as the day.'

'Don't you fancy,' and Dunchy shook his head derisively, 'that Roger can't act a part so well as any other one; and what he said and did is all of a piece with a jealous-minded man.'

'What, to hold me to un as he never did before! —strain me to his heart, and keep me there until my breath was all but gone! No, Dunchy, no; it won't do; it ain't that.'

'Why, bless the maid, every word you says but

drives the nail more home. The thing's as plain to me as the sun and moon up above the sky. The chap's gone mazed through jealous love and doubts of 'ee, that's what 'tis; and the wonder is you'm standin' where you be, and not lyin' stark and cold to the bottom o' the sea.'

Loyalty had raised her head, and was looking at him; evidently his words were having weight with her.

'What's writ,' he said, 'is true, and Bible truth, too—that love is cruel as death, jealousy deep as the grave; and when doubts enters into a man's heart, 'tain't long afore murder steps in to keep it company.'

'Why didn't he do it, then?' she cried in anguish. 'Fifty thousand times I'd rather so than live to see un wed with Phœbe Rowe.'

'And didn't he know that, too? Why I sees it all, with half a eye. Talk about dyin'!—*you*. Lors! what a handful you women be. Wuss to have dealin's with than a whole ship's company.'

But Loyalty, generally so easily cheered by him, still hung her head despairingly.

'Now what you must do,' continued Dunchy, 'is seek out Roger, and make a clean breast to un 'bout it all. What took 'ee to see the Cap'en I don't know; but this I'm sure of, 'tain't nothing that a maid can't tell to the man she's goin' to marry.'

'No,' she said; 'and if yesternight Roger had taxed me with it, I'd ha' told un every word that passed, knowin' that her whose secret it is would

surely have forgived me. But with he promised to another one, and she such as Phœbe Rowe—No!' and she shook her head sadly; 'my tongue's tied, my mouth's closed.'

'Well, then,' said Dunchy hastily, 'mine isn't; and if you won't speak for yourself, I'll speak for 'ee, and up and tell Roger all I knows, and that whatever's hid from un he can hear the truth of, if he's a mind to; and as for Phœbe Rowe,' and a movement of his lips, which sent out a fine sprinkling of tobacco-juice, conveyed the contempt in which he held her, 'us must look up some other husband for she. Any carrion will choke a crow.'

Then, thinking it might be better, perhaps, that Loyalty should consider over this alternative alone, Dunchy feigned to occupy himself by taking a few steps further up the hill, and, looking seaward, to see what the promise of the weather might be. Banked-up masses of dark clouds, with here and there great fissures in the sky—the water glittering like steel, an under-current seeming to keep it in constant restless motion.

'Squally,' he muttered, as he retraced his steps; 'blowin' up dirty to windward,' he added, addressing Loyalty, whose side he had reached; but she didn't heed him. She was standing as he had left her, only that her head was raised and her eyes fixed on vacancy.

'Come,' he said, taking her by the hand, 'you and me'll be gettin' back home.'

She shook her head.

'Iss, now!' he said persuasively. 'Why that was what you was wantin' to do?'

There was another shake of the head, which Dunchy answered by adding: 'And as we goes along you can tell me all of it, from beginnin' to end —how the old woman comed to tell 'ee, where 'twas the both of 'ee met, and what her said to you and you said to she.'

'Oh, Dunchy,' and Loyalty's drawn face bespoke the poignancy of her regret, ''tis that that's bowin' me down with shame. I can't tell 'ee how I felt when she first out with that 'bout partners with Rowe: 'twas just as if somethin' inside was all set into a blaze; and you knows what I am when my blood's up; I don't pick and choose my words then.'

'Did 'ee give th' old baggage her awn?' said Dunchy, the chuckle in his voice betraying his satisfaction.

'I can't hardly tell what I said; but I knows sayin' it at all, leave alone sayin it to she, is more than enough to seal my doom with Roger.'

'Tish! tine-a-by!' exclaimed Dunchy pettishly. 'He must be precious weak-stomached if he can't stand a oath or two. 'Tain't what you said that angers me; 'tis catchin' at the raison her gived 'ee, when it won't hold water. That's where I blames 'ee, and where you'll find he'll blame 'ee too.'

Loyalty heaved a sigh that seemed to come from the very depths of her soul. Laying her hand on

her old friend's shoulder, she looked into his face with eyes filled with sadness.

'Dunchy,' she said, 'you knows how I worships Roger; that my love for him is as boundless as the sand of the sea, which you can't number nor measure. 'Twould be as nothin' to me to have to die for Roger; but to try and bend myself to some of his ways is almost sometimes more than I can bear. Do 'ee know what 'tis '—and the pleading voice and the expression of the lovely face were in harmony—'when them as you've growed up with, them who's been more than kind to 'ee, is called rogues and cheats and offal,' and unconsciously the disdainful raising of her head was an imitation of Roger, 'and you've to keep a silent tongue atween your teeth, and strive with what's inside a-callin' shame and treachery on 'ee that you don't speak out and stand up for 'em? Well, 'twas all that, that when his mother spoke come over me. I felt that the two of 'em had strove to drag me down lower than I ever was, and that through tryin' to get *respectable* like they, I was left forced to hang my head afore—well, Dunchy, afore even you.'

'Lor bless 'ee, lovey,' said the old man tenderly, 'don't you go for to vex your mind in upholdin' o' the old Dunchy. Nothin' that Roger Coode could lie his tongue to could be quarter so bad as the names I gives to myself, knowin' I'm deservin' o' the same. I'm a hoary old sinner, Loyalty; and you can't say better nor wuss o' me; and I never expects Chapel folks and they to do aught else than pass me by. If

ever I gets aloft, which I haven't no rights to do, 'twill be through havin' a good word spoke up for me—and there's never no knowin' where you've got a messmate to. I've sailed with they who, if they got the chance, mind, wud spake up for the old Dunchy.'

She tried to give a little wintry smile, but the effort brought back the tears to her eyes.

'You go along down home, Dunchy,' she said, for he had taken her hand again. 'I sha'n't come to no harm. I've many's the time roamed the Clifts all the night long, when I've felt as I do now, that four walls wouldn't hold me.'

'All right! Only, if you stays, I stays too. I don't fear the cold,' and he rubbed first his elbow and then his knee, ''cos the screws 'ull help to keep the heat up in me—they've bin tunin' up pretty merry for the last hour and more.'

Loyalty was caught by the hook thus baited.

'Poor old soul,' she said, at once beginning to descend, 'come. At all events, I'll go so far as the Ferry with 'ee.'

And the Ferry reached, she was enticed over; and once across, Dunchy told her he didn't mean to leave her; he should bear her company as far as The Cot, and get a stretch-out for the night on a settle there.

He saw that the girl's emotional nature was shaken to its very foundation. By turns she was threatened with fits of uncontrollable grief and paroxysms of despair, and to the very utmost Dunchy tried to

grapple with and overcome each. He would dry her tears by dwelling upon Roger's love, of which this jealousy was a certain proof. He would draw her from despair by giving his own experience of courtships long ago, which, to quote himself, had been nothing but 'scrimmages from beginnin' to end, and was only made up to set to at another rumpus.' And the store of these chequered romances failing him, he had recourse to familiar sayings and old songs, where sweethearts, like scissors, were only parted to be brought together again.

'Why, there was the Fair Rosamy,' he said; 'didn't 'ee never hear tell about she?—how the old Jezebel of a queen gived pison to her? How does it go now?' and his cracked old voice began piping out—

'"What eased the smartin' of her breast,
And did its anguish soothe,
Was a-knowin' that the course of true-u love
Never yet did run smooth."

'I reckon I hasn't got the tune exact,' he said with a little air of complacency, 'but them's the words, though I haven't sung 'em—well, not for up forty year. I'd a purty voice o' my own once. They'd all draw up around when Dunchy was goin' to reel off a song.'

'But you wasn't called Dunchy then, was 'ee?'

Loyalty could have repeated beforehand the answer he would give her, but in her turn she was making an effort by feigning interest in all he said to her.

'No; 'cos I wasn't deaf. Silvester, that's my name'; and, as was always his custom, he spelt it letter by letter—"S i l v e s t e r." 'Tis in the Prayer-book; there you'll find it, the last day as ever is.'

'Was 'ee christened by that name, then?'

'Well, I 'spects 'bout that time they wasn't in much of a christenin' mood. They was the real old roarin' Christmases then, when passon, clerk, and people all held the one mind; so that if I got christened at all, they most like ducked my head into a good bowl o' punch; and, so far as that goes, I shouldn't so much mind havin' another o' they christenin's now.'

'You'm dead beat, Dunchy, I know you be.'

'No, no, I b'ain't; not I,' and the poor old chap tried to brisk himself up chirpily. He was tired, empty, cold; he could hardly drag his stiff old legs along, but the stanch heart and brave spirit still held the mastery over the weary body.

Outcasts, these two, and held as such by those they dwelt among; and yet, perchance, angels watching them as they took their way grew jubilant over that charity, fidelity, and great unselfish love—gems in the crown of poor humanity.

The Cot reached, Loyalty looked about for her grandfather, but he was still nowhere to be seen. She spread the scanty contents of the cupboard before Dunchy, revived his taxed strength with a tumbler of grog, and then—making the fire up—she drew the settle on which the old fellow was to stretch

himself over to the hearth, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him sink into a sound sleep. Throwing her shawl over her head, she stole through the room and out of the door. Familiar with nature from her birth, the elements were as companions to her. She looked at the stars, and they looked back at her; she sighed, and the sea seemed to echo her sigh in sympathy. Around, the air to her was filled with an invisible presence, whose divinity she recognised by raising her eyes and hands to heaven. Gradually the peace she sought began to come, and the tears which followed brought ease to her overcharged bosom.

Drawing beneath the shelter of a projecting rock, Loyalty lay down; and there, in silence and alone, she kept the watches of the night, until again dawn trembled in the sky, the east quickened, and lo, another day was born.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE vigil which Loyalty kept was kept also by Roger. Not, as in her case, with the sea sounding soothingly in his ears, and the keen salt air cooling his fevered blood, but sitting cramped, silent, in darkness, and alone: afraid to move, afraid to sigh, afraid to groan—oppressed by what was his principal fear, that the slightest thing out of the common order of events might arouse suspicions which would interfere with his resolution.

The room he lodged in, scarce a stone's-throw from the house occupied by Captain Hamlyn, faced Stonehouse pool, and from its window—slightly projecting—Roger could catch sight of the dark murky water. Something in this sight—which his mind seemed callous to—sent now and again a shiver through his body, and he would then try and bring before himself, so that he might seriously consider it, that which was about to happen to him. But in vain. He was too much alive, his passions were too fierce. Anger, hatred, revenge, were all too hot within him, to realize that before that time to-morrow all would be over, and he dead, cold, and still. He could see his enemy so lying, and take a murderous delight in looking at him; but for himself, impossible!

And yet the future was not without interest to him, and he was conscious of a disappointment that he should not see how the tidings of their death would be received, and a devilish twinkle came into his eye, as he laughed over the lamentations sure to be raised, and the amazement felt that two such seamen should have lost their lives within sight of the homes where both of them had been born.

One gray head bowed down with grief had haunted him all day long, and no stronger proof could he have given of his love, than that he refrained from sending any token or farewell word to his mother. His heart yearned towards her—yearned to tell her that what she would count as her crown of sorrow

was in reality the happiest ending that could happen to her son. As in a vision, Roger believed he saw the degradation which, if he lived, would most surely overtake him.

Holding Loyalty for what he did, there had been moments in that day when he had struggled as with a wild beast to keep himself from seeking her, and, flinging all else to the wind, bask in the sunlight of her love. Never should that infamy brand him! Welcome death a thousand times rather than live that vile creature which his higher nature loathed and shrank from.

As for the life he would sacrifice with his own, a righteous exaltation justified him in his own sight, and made the revenge and hate which stirred him seem good in his eyes. The earth would be well rid of such a tempter, and, more than that—the being he exalted above other women—Miss Anne—while she was spared the possibility of any union with this man, would also be spared the grief which the knowledge of his true character would cause her.

These thoughts, which had occupied Roger all day long, mingled as they had been with anxieties, trivialities, mad schemes and wishes, settled themselves during the night into more sober order. Sitting in the darkness, his elbows on the table, his head hidden in his hands, much of his former life seemed to pass before him, only to confirm in him the steadfast certainty that the conclusion he had come to was the right one.

Through those dark watches the bewitchment of that lovely face was scarce ever absent—into his eyes those liquid, melting orbs seemed gazing. Do what he would, press his fingers as he did, until his aching eyeballs showed globes of fire, he could not banish the distracting vision. The lips he gnawed in agony, to keep back the utterance of every sound, were tingling with remembrance of the kisses they had plucked from off her mouth. His arms trembled, his hands fell powerless, crossed as though still encircling that faultless form, and with a mad leap his heart began to beat, so that had he not stifled all sound in the coverings of the near-by bed, her name, 'Loyalty,' would have echoed through the stillness of the silent night.

Live with her he would not—live without her he could not—and this conviction gaining strength as the hours went on, the steadfastness of his purpose seemed to stamp itself on his face and on the grave sedateness of his actions.

The intuition of his sailor mind told him when dawn was approaching, and knowing that others now would be soon astir, he went steathily out of the house and up the hill to a point of the ramparts, from where, far away over the sea, the glimmer of day was seen faintly showing. With anxious eyes he stood watching the gradual spread of light, well pleased to note the leaden sky, and that the wind was still freshening. Every now and then a dread of something putting off or preventing this arranged

trip made him sick and faint, but once alive to the necessity for all his strength being needed, he went back to the house to find out when breakfast would be ready. In prospect of what was to happen, Rozzy had been given leave by Roger to go home. The arrangements had been concluded on the previous night and the hour for his starting fixed upon. But now a violent desire seized hold on Roger to see the boy; he felt he must send a message to his mother, so that she might find some gleam of comfort in the knowledge that he had been thinking of her. As he walked along to where Rozzy would be sure to pass, he turned over in his mind what he might safely say without giving rise to any suspicion. Roger's conscience made him over-sensitive in this respect, and one thing after another was dismissed as seeming to him to convey a double meaning. What if he asked his mother to go up to Miss Anne, and tell her the little cutter which a chum of his was rigging in the dockyard would be ready by the end of the week: should he take it to her or to the young gentleman it was meant for. And then he could add something on, for his mother only—and it might be the means of drawing her and Miss Anne still more together.

As Roger had thought, Rozzy soon came in sight, and was very relieved to find no stop put upon his holiday. He repeated at Roger's request the message he gave him to deliver; and having it correctly fixed in his mind, Roger added, 'And you

say to Mrs. Coode's that she's to go up *herself* to Miss Anne, because I said that nobody else could do it so proper as she could.'

Mentally Rozzy, disgusted at being defrauded of the cakes or pasty always given him at Miss Anne's, soliloquized that 'twas just like they Coodes, thinkin' nobody can't do nothin' but they.' Aloud, he promised to implicitly obey his instructions, and off he went—but not more than twenty yards when a sharp call brought him back. An impulse over which, for the moment, Roger had had no control, had sent forth that cry. He must look again at the eyes which were going to look on those his eyes would never see more; he must hear the voice that those would listen to, whose ears would never hear him speak again. But by the time the boy reached him his will had mastered his desire, and he said harshly, 'There, never mind. Be off with you!' And not waiting for a second bidding, Rozzy was gone.

Eleven o'clock was the time fixed as best suited for the sail. Roger had called at Baker's Place, and had sent up his message asking if Captain Hamlyn approved of that hour.

'Yes, Coode, excellent!' the Captain had called down from above. 'But I've some little business in George Street to do before starting, so that if you'll take the boat round to the hard under Mount Wise and wait there, I'll be ready for you. You understand?'

'All right, sir. Eleven, the hour's to be?'

'Eleven, yes. Oh, I shall be there—very likely before you are.'

With the all but certainty that this profession of over-punctuality meant an hour late, Roger's brows contracted, but only to smooth out again — what mattered it? — an hour longer to live! — at best a short respite. And he was a trifle sarcastic as to the mighty hurry he was in to quit this world, and almost tried a joke with himself about the coldness of the water.

Arrived at the slip close to the bridge where the pleasure boats were kept during the winter, Roger began getting ready.

'You'll have a soakin' afore you get back,' said the owner of the shed.

'Yes, I reckon,' said Roger indifferently.

'H'm! You'm fonder of a wet jacket than I be: and, unless I'm mistook,' and he scanned the clouds with a weather-wise eye, 'outside the wind's a-blowin'.'

'That's what's sendin' us out,' said Roger.

'It won't send 'ee home, though, not while 'tis in this quarter; why not advise with the Cap'en to put it off? I should, if I was you.'

'Not I!' said Roger; ''twas I proposed it to him. What's the good of a craft that you don't know what she'll be after? Half the battle's in knowin' your boat.'

'All right; I ain't wantin' to hinder 'ee from goin'. I 'spects I should ha' gone myself when I was your

age.' He walked away, adding over his shoulder, 'But I ain't such a fool now.'

Roger, generally very ready with his repartee, took no notice, indeed he seemed not to have heard; and the man, a trifle disappointed at his sarcasm having fallen flat, stood at a little distance watching the preparations, until finally, by the aid of a friendly hand, the boat was shoved off, and went on her way.

Kept waiting, as he expected he should be, under Mount Wise, Roger's eye was caught by the little wall, the same that he had leaned against three days since. Three days! Was it possible that it could be no longer? Three years ago seemed nearer to him. There are events in our lives, crises of joy and sorrow, for which time has no measurement. We seem to have shaken off a score of years, or added them on, in the space of as many hours.

Rapidly Roger recalled how he had stood, thinking, dreaming, building castles for the future. The ring! —he thrust in his hand and pulled it out, intending to fling it from him, but his hand closed over it as if it were stuck to his palm. No—let it be—what mattered it? He would not look at the thing, but he would not throw it away. And, half-ashamed of his weakness, he decided that the less he now gave way to reflection the better it would be, and he began to exchange remarks with the men who were going and coming around.

'I say,' said one, making a trumpet of his hand, 'here comes "Enchantin' Charlie!"' and he turned

up his elbow and winked his eye in the direction of the hill, down which, with a lady on either side of him, Roger saw Captain Hamlyn coming. 'You ain't goin' to take them two clippers he's convoyin' aboard, are yer?'

'Not that I know by,' said Roger, watching the two with some anxiety.

''Cos, if so, the ducks 'ud get a duckin',' and the speaker laughed heartily—amused at his own joke—which Roger took no notice of, he was too engrossed in waiting to see whether the Captain would say good-bye to, or go on with, the ladies.

But at the foot of the awkward flight of steps which had brought them to Richmond Walk the party separated; and it was now, seeing Carleton Hamlyn coming towards him, that Roger's whole body began to tremble.

'Am I past my time, Coode? I fancy I must be. It's my belief that all the confounded clocks and watches in the town are wrong.'

'Oh, it doesn't matter, sir.' Roger was seized with an indescribable impatience to get him into the boat and be gone. It was like seeing a prize all but within grasp, and dreading that it would yet escape you.

'Well, but doesn't it matter?—eh? Isn't it perhaps a little late? Better put it off 'til to-morrow.'

'Just what you said yesterday, sir,' Roger spoke a little quickly; 'nothing could suit better than to-day—the wind we want, and enough of it.'

'The poor devil's been hanging about in the cold 'til his temper's got short,' thought the Captain; but this in no way influencing him, he was about to give his decision to remain, when his ear caught: '. . . and it ain't everybody, neither, as cares to be blowed out into the Sound. You take my advice, sir,'—the speaker was a grumpy-looking seafaring man, who looked well disposed, for some private reason of his own, to quarrel with anybody,—'don't you be talked into goin' where you haven't a mind to. 'Tis plain to see'—this was addressed to Roger —'that the gentleman don't want to go.'

Captain Hamlyn was already half in the boat; any direct interference with what he intended to do was an offence to him. Added to which those were the days of quarter-deck authority, and a man of that class presuming to volunteer advice to his superior, roused the Captain to a degree that, had the sea been mountains high and the wind blowing great guns, out of that boat nothing would have kept him.

CHAPTER XL

ALWAYS, by reason of his enforced shore-going life, a little testy at not being immediately recognised as a naval officer, Captain Hamlyn took his seat in the boat too ruffled to notice that Rozzy was not of the party. They were soon under way, getting fairly on, though not feeling much force of wind until, between Redding Point and St. Nicholas Island, the breeze

beginning to freshen, some alteration in the trim of the boat led him to say—

'Why, what has become of that scoundrel of a boy?'

'He got leave yesterday to go home,' began Roger evasively.

'And hasn't thought proper to walk himself back again,' interrupted the Captain, thinking this the explanation of Roger's hesitation. 'Upon my life if I know what things are coming to, the very youngsters have got to defy you. It's half your own fault, though, Coode; you don't rope's-end him enough. It's Jack's as good as his master with everybody now—downright rank mutiny.'

Roger made no reply, and the Captain, not over well pleased with his glum face and the curt answers he had received from him, mentally added, 'And you, too, no better than the rest, as surly as a bear with a sore head because you happen to have been kept waiting a half-hour or so. Ah, my fine fellows! bless your stars that you ain't aboard a ship with me for your captain. I'd bring you to your bearings, or I'd flog, masthead, keelhaul every man of you.'

It was a pet conceit of his to talk as if he had been one of the greatest martinets in the navy, instead of a most popular commander, always adored by his ship's company.

These threats of what he would have done seemed to restore good-humour to him; and the wind continuing to rise as they stood more out to sea, Roger

proposed to take a reef in, the Captain commenting the while on the good behaviour of the little craft—generally condemned as too crank by everybody.

'I say, though, Coode,' he said, as nearing Staddon the whole stretch of ocean was seen spread before them, 'it's looking uncommonly dirty to seaward.'

A haze had crept stealthily up, to be lost in the low hanging leaden sky. Together they formed a wall of mist enshrouding all beyond.

'I don't want to make a night of it outside here. We needn't go further than there's a chance of getting back from.'

Roger did not speak, but his face pooh-poohed such fears.

'They say what's born to be hanged will never be drowned,' added the Captain cheerily; 'but as I don't think hemp is written on your forehead or mine, it behoves us to be more careful than some smudge-faced fellows I've known.'

Roger gave a loud laugh in which there was no merriment; but Captain Hamlyn did not notice its absence. Like a true son of Neptune, his spirits had risen at the prospect of a good stiff breeze. A little excitement and adventure, with no more probable danger than a wetting and some delay, were quite to his mind.

'Take another reef in, Coode'—they were getting a heavier sea now that the Point was turned,—'and don't you hug the Shag Stone. Keep her as close to the wind as you like, but give her sea room.'

There was a want of readiness in the way in which Roger carried out these commands scarcely noticeable to a less practised eye.

'All this coast up and down here is as well known to me as Fore Street is,' said the Captain. 'I've sailed over every inch of it since I didn't stand higher than that gunwale.'

'I know it pretty well myself,' said Roger, intent on seeing that the small vessels they were passing were getting fewer and more far between.

'Of course you do!'—the Captain thought that Roger felt a little hurt in his seamanship—'only, my good fellow, you have two arms, and I have only one. However, you had best keep a sharp look-out, for, by the Lord Harry, I should hold on to you like grim death. So I give you fair warning.'

Again Roger laughed—this time more noisily than before. He saw beyond the Mew Stone the angle that would suit him; the point from where the Cliffs on either side the river's mouth can be seen, and where the balustraded roof of Ferrers House comes into view.

Again Captain Hamlyn plunged into the comparative merits of the *Racer* and other boats he had had in his time, when they were caught by a wave which made them shake themselves like drenched dogs.

'This is a little more than I bargained for,' laughed the Captain, flipping his fingers to rid them of the salt water he had pressed from out his eyes. 'Come,

Coode, isn't discretion the better part of valour—eh? What do you say?'

'That I'm not for going back,' said Roger; and the gruff tone which at another time would have struck Carleton Hamlyn passed on account of the loud wind and the rate at which they were going.

'I see! You've made up your mind for a night on the ocean wave, have you?'

'Besides,' added Roger, as if he had not heard the rejoinder, 'there's Ferrers. If we're short took, we can always bear up for the Yealm river.' He had so set his mind on that particular spot that he said anything to beguile the Captain into going on so far.

'Whew! Oh!'—Captain Hamlyn was most unwisely courting the wind by giving vent to a shrill whistle—'so the cat's out of the bag at last. I thought you were uncommonly sharp set on getting me afloat to-day,' and in one of those flashes of thought which pass through the mind, he saw an excellent solution of a difficulty—driven in by stress of weather—forced to seek shelter from Anne—all the awkwardness of a planned visit would be obviated by the necessity of the thing.

Quick to catch at each new resolve, he was at once eager that this wish should come to pass.

'All right, Coode, I've an enormous sympathy with people who are in love. Manage that we can't get back to Dock, and I won't betray you.'

'But for the night, sir—what will you do?'

Roger's question was prompted by intense curiosity.

'Well, there would be but one course open—being at Ferrers, I must go to the House.' He saw that Roger was looking fixedly at him: and misinterpreting the look, he added: 'Don't let that interfere with you; on the contrary, there are certain things we desire to do, and yet hesitate over; and it is a relief when Providence seems to take the matter from out our hands and act for us. I have already spoken to you about events which have for years kept me from my home; well—now—I trust you, when I tell you that I am as eager to return as I once was to stay away.'

Embarrassed by the fixity of Roger's gaze, Carleton Hamlyn had looked away while saying this, so that the sudden change of expression in Roger's face was lost upon him. The answer he might have expected was of necessity interrupted by the heavy seas they were now shipping; but the Mew Stone once weathered, the wind would be on the starboard quarter, and their worst troubles would be over.

The spot Roger had chosen was now close by; an electric thrill seemed to run through him. The rope in his hand trembled; he had to grasp the pin round which he was going to make it fast.

'Don't belay the sheet, Coode,' called out the Captain, suddenly catching sight of what he was doing; 'keep it in hand. God's sake, man, what are you after?'

The doggedness of Roger's face, as he went on

without paying him any heed, struck Carleton Hamlyn as peculiar. Laying his hand on the rope to free it, he said in a quiet tone of command, 'Never forget, Coode, that I am always Captain on board my own vessel.'

Sitting dexterously down on the rope, so as to make it impossible that it could be interfered with, Roger looked straight up into Captain Hamlyn's face, with eyes that had the glare of a wild beast about to spring.

'When we're on shore,' he began, and the vibration which was going on within him made him speak slowly, 'you're master, and I'm man; but here, with naught but the sky above and the waters below, we're both as God Almighty made us;—equal man and man, only that you're an infernal scoundrel, and I'm an ugly customer that that game don't pay with. It come to my ears what was goin' on, and I played the spy on you; and that day that you offered me money to marry Loyalty George you signed the warrant for your own death, for I swore an oath, as I stood before you then, that I'd bring you here and jump overboard with you, and that I mean to do; so if you've any prayers to say you'd best begin, and be sharp about 'em too.'

Excited, overwrought as he was, Roger noted that the Captain did not flinch.

'Oh,' he said, 'it's that, is it, that your mind is made up to? Well, seeing how heavily I'm weighted,' and there was a quick glance at the empty sleeve

and back again to Roger, 'I can't say it's much to the credit of a British sailor.'

'No, it isn't,' said Roger; 'and if I'd had the courage to face Jack Ketch I'd have sooner torn ye limb from limb; but I'm chicken-hearted about having a rope put round my neck. It's easier to give you a hug, and go overboard together.'

'You're mad,' said the Captain, putting his hand on Roger's shoulder; and as the two stood, they were a fine contrast the one to the other.

Roger, filled with murderous ungovernable passion, his eyes starting, his features working, the veins in his temples and neck standing out like cords—bursting; Carleton Hamlyn, cool, collected; his face a little sharpened by the sudden strain put on him, but with his natural courage, made practical and of more than ordinary service by the training it had had in a life of constant emergency and danger. It was not the first time by many that he and death had brushed shoulders together, and that he was still living made it possible that he might still live.

'Mad,' he repeated emphatically, careful not to take his eye off Roger.

'If you like. I may be. 'Twas what you said *her* father was; he who got swung through you! How do I know,' and he shook himself free, 'that 'twasn't some devil's game of this sort you'd been after then?'

He stopped, for Carleton Hamlyn's studied calmness had suddenly gone from him. His whole face

altered, his eyes looked away; but for a moment only —the next he was speaking.

'And had that unfortunate man,' he said, 'served me as you propose to do, every right was on his side. I had wronged him deeply, vilely. *You* I have never wronged. Loyalty George is my daughter.'

Roger made as if he would spring at his throat; but with his hand outstretched he fell back, his jaw dropped, his eyes remained fixed, the scales seemed to have fallen from them. The face before him reflected that other face graven on his heart, bearing living testimony that the truth had been told him. 'Lie' grew faint on his lips and died away, and in its place came forth a groan—a groan which in an instant was changed to a sharp cry as both men shouted 'Look out!'

A sudden squall had caught the crank little craft; she heeled over as if she would never right herself again. A heavy sea with all its force was flung against the mainsail; there was a snap, a crash, and overboard the mast fell.

Quicker than it takes to tell, the whole thing had happened and was over. With sailor-like smartness in the face of danger, the Captain and Roger were both working with a will; cutting away the wreck and disentangling it, so that the unlucky little vessel should not at once be staved in.

Free, unmanageable, answering to nothing, she began rapidly drifting towards the not far distant reefs.

'Make ready for anchoring,' said the Captain; 'it's the one chance left us.' His tone of command, and the alacrity with which it was obeyed, showed that his authority was regained. Roger drew from the bottom of the boat the anchor, and, bending the cable, let it go.

The Captain this while was with his one hand dexterously fastening his pocket-handkerchief to the boat-hook; that done, he waited for Roger to lash it to the stump of the mast.

'That ought to fetch them,' he said; 'there's sure to be somebody on the look-out.'

Roger ground his teeth; he knew who would be watching them—the vile old ruffian who had lured him to his ruin—oh! the tool, the cat's-paw he had been made! He saw through it all now, and the snare into which he had fallen.

The necessity for prompt action over, he had bent down his head, holding it between his two hands. He dare not look at the Captain, and he felt there was nothing he could say to him.

The constant rocking of the boat, as she lay tossed at the mercy of the angry sea, made anything like conversation impossible, yet Carleton Hamlyn, seeing the misery and despair of the man at his side, could not refrain from trying to say some few words to ease his burden.

'Come, Coode,' he said, and he gave a friendly grip to Roger's shoulder, 'look up, my man. Before God, whatever happens I bear you no anger. Who knows

the cost of temptation better than I do? Vengeance seems to let some get the slip; but, by the Lord, she rides rough shod over others. The prospect of death now, pshaw!'—and he snapped his fingers in the air; '*that* to what I suffered at the death of that poor wretch Kellow. It's getting on for twenty years ago, but touch the wound and it bleeds as fresh as ever.'

Roger turned towards Carleton Hamlyn a face ashen and pale as the face of a dying man. 'Your death,' he said, 'must lie at my door—I am your murderer.'

'But, my good fellow, I don't mean to die; and I don't mean you to die, either. On a day like this there's sure to be half a dozen on the look-out. It's only a question of her bearing the strain that's put on her.'

Each minute the pitching was becoming more violent. The wind, rising with the tide, lashed the sea into greater fury. Wave after wave struck the little vessel, making her plunge like some unruly beast striving with all its strength to set itself free.

From the bows out into which he had crept, Roger's eyes scanned each projection of one line of coast, the Captain's keen glance following in the opposite direction. Suddenly he raised a shout. 'Thank God!' he cried, and Roger saw that from Worsewell a signal was being made to them.

'We ought to give an answer, Coode. What can we run up?' Roger put his hand to his neckerchief.

'The very thing;' and Captain Hamlyn watched approvingly the dexterous management by which Roger balanced himself while clinging round the jury-mast, so as at the moment of the boat righting to snatch off the handkerchief, jerk it free, and slip it in a knot round the top. As he did so something bright flew out of the corner, rebounded on the gunwale, and fell into the sea.

'What was it?' asked the Captain, seeing that Roger had dropped down and was gazing over the side into the water.

'The ring I was to have wed her with,' he said in a hollow tone.

'Oh, if that's all, there are hundreds more that will serve as well. We'll soon get another ring for her.'

'No other ring will ever be wanted by me,' said Roger despondingly.

With the superstition of a sailor he looked on this accident as an omen of evil fatality to him.

'Come, come, don't say that to me!'—the Captain's spirits had risen, he was speaking in his usual merry way—'not want a ring to marry the girl who would rather be your wife than be acknowledged before the world as my daughter, and I vow and believe would forego both rather than cast shame on the memory of her mother.' Carleton Hamlyn's voice broke. 'Coode, there are not many such women in the world. I think I am not wrong in saying that God has blessed us with the love of

two for whose sakes we will live—live to be better men. On this give me your hand!'

Roger took the hand, and with the solemnity of a sacred oath he registered that vow—Come what might he would dedicate his life to Loyalty; but as to looking forward to her marrying him—to letting herself become his wife—his answer was a groan of despair. One desperate longing he felt, one unspoken prayer his heart kept sending up, that he might live to once more hold her in his arms—tell her that all he had done was done through the great love he bore her, and then—happen what might to him—he did not care.

'I can see others now on Worsewell,' said the Captain—his eyes were fixed on the stretched-out headland—'they are coming up quick and sharp, one after the other. It can't be long now; there are no smarter men going than the Ferrers men are, and I wish——' But in a moment a mighty wave had engulfed them; the two men were knocked into the bottom of the boat and carried under the thwarts, and when sense returned and they scrambled up, it was to find that they were being drifted rapidly along. The ill-fated little vessel had parted her cable, and was rushing to her fate on that terrible reef which runs out between the Mew Stone and the mainland.

CHAPTER XLI

THE men collected on Worsewell were the first to catch sight of the disaster which had befallen the doomed little *Racer*.

What vessel she was, or who those were on board her, not one had an idea—they only saw fellow-men in danger; and although there was but faint hope of rendering any real service, they all hurried down towards the water's edge to try and get across by the river to the opposite shore.

The boat going to the rescue was labouring to clear the mouth of the harbour, her crew unable to give any attention to the perplexing signals made to them by those on land. The heavy surf dashing over the rocks amid which they were steering made rowing along the coast impossible. Their only chance was to get clear out to where the roll of the waves was longer; but, unknown to them, before that spot could be reached, those they had gone to succour would be helplessly cast on the reefs off Ferrers Bay.

About the coast on the Ferrers side a few women were dotted, mostly the wives of the men away fishing—anxious, in the face of the rising storm, to see their husbands return.

Only on the Shag Cliff a man was standing—Jake George—his murderous eyes strained out over the sea.

Since daybreak he had been roaming the Cliffs over, torn between the desire to fetch Loyalty, and the fear of losing sight of the spot where Roger had said he would be. The few who met him had been scared by the wild looks and mutterings of the old man, and Mrs. Coode coming across him, on her way to deliver to Miss Anne the message brought by Rozzy, had hurried on, turning a deaf ear to something he continued to call out after her.

Arriving at Ferrers House, in a rather breathless condition, she found everyone in great excitement there. From the upper windows a little vessel had been seen, in evident distress, with her masts gone, and Miss Anne was going on the Cliff to get a better sight of her. Off with her started Mrs. Coode, deciding that the Shag Cliff would be the best point for them. From that butting height you see all around, from Stoke Point down into Ferrers Bay.

Somewhat in advance, Anne was first to reach the spot, to find there old George, his face towards the sea, shouting and tossing up his arms with the frantic gestures of a madman.

Terrified by his brutal aspect, and always in dread of his violent hate, she was about to run back, but by a turn of his head he recognised her. With a sudden spring he seized her by the arm, dragged her over, and while his trembling hand pointed to the distant vessel he shrieked out 'Hamlyn—Murderer!' and to Mrs. Coode, who had just come up, 'Son—Roger.' His hold relaxed, and the burst of excitement over,

he fell forward on the little parapet of stones, a seemingly senseless heap.

The two women looked at each other, their hearts beating too violently to at once let them speak. The dread they could find no utterance for was seen in the eyes they turned on that wave-tossed speck, and then turned despairingly on one another. Suddenly they caught the sound of voices drawing near; Anne flew down the slope to meet the welcome comers, giving a cry of joy as she recognised, together with three or four women, Dunchy and Loyalty.

During the best part of the morning Loyalty had been searching for her grandfather, fearing from his continued absence—for he had not returned to The Cot since parting with Roger—that something must have happened to him. Usually how he came and went had been a matter of no concern to her; but enfeebled as he now was in mind and body, she felt that henceforth he needed a protector, and that protector she would be. Greatly touched by the silence he had maintained about the frailty of her mother, the girl was softened toward the old sinner, and she resolved to set off and seek him, however much the effort cost her.

For Loyalty was in no mood that day to show herself among her fellow-creatures; the sense of her injuries lay heavy on her. Her heart rose in rebellion against the injustice which had cast her off and flung her aside for another. Desolate, abandoned, life seemed too cruel; the hot tears that filled her eyes

she forced back again, refusing the relief of any softening emotion.

By Rowton, through the village, she had gone to the Cat and Fiddle; but no one there had seen or heard of the old man. On to Dunchy, who had already made inquiries without getting any information. Someone had suggested that it was likely he was at Wakeham's, that he had gone, perhaps, to the Mew Stone, and was not able to get back again. Loyalty decided that she would go on to Ferrers Bay and inquire if he had been seen by any of the mill people. Dunchy, relieved by the stormy weather of anyone wanting to cross the ferry, volunteered to accompany her; and the two, in order to get to the Ferrers side, going round by Bridge End, had heard nothing of the disaster until they met some women going up the Cliffs, who told them there was a boat outside in danger. Then they had stopped to watch the rescue party clear the Bar, and were hurrying up to the best vantage point, when they suddenly found themselves face to face with Miss Anne.

'Loyalty,' cried Miss Anne, 'your grandfather——'

The girl started forward.

'Somethin's happened to un!' she gasped. 'What is it, Miss Anne?'

'I don't know—come with me; he's up there. He has been pointing to the wrecked boat and calling out Hamlyn—Roger. What can it mean? What makes him think it is they?'

'Oh, if you'm goin' by anythin' he's sayin', there

ain't no meanin' in it. He's gone all wrong here o' late'—and she passed her hand across her forehead —'and gives way to all manner o' fancies; don't he, Dunchy? But you needn't to fear un no longer, miss; for, willin' to as he might be, he ain't now got the strength to hurt a fly.'

'Yes, but his words and manner up here struck Mrs. Coode with terror as well as me.'

At mention of Mrs. Coode, Loyalty's face darkened.

'There ain't no call for terror, any ways,' she said roughly. 'Whoever 'tis outside is safe enough by this time; us watched the boat that's goin' to 'em cross the Bar afore we came up alongs.'

Mrs. Coode stepped down from where she had been standing and joined in Miss Anne's ejaculation of thankfulness. Loyalty stooped over her grandfather's prostrate figure, calling in his ear, 'Granfer! don't 'ee know? 'Tis me, Loyalty. What be doin' up here? Where have 'ee been to? I's been searchin' for 'ee everywheres.'

The quiver which seemed to run through every limb showed that the old man heard her.

'You must come home now, 'long with me,' and she tried to raise him, adding, as she found he resisted her: 'Folks is bein' frightened into fits by what you'm tellin' up to 'em. What meanin' had 'ee got in sayin' such things, eh?'

A rattling noise in his throat frightened her. She tried to get her hand in to set his neck free, and called to Dunchy to come and help her.

Instinctively Mrs. Coode bent forward, but with a wave of her hand Loyalty pushed her aside.

'Let be,' she said; 'us wants no help from you. Here, Dunchy, hoist un on to his legs with me; 'twill ease un for the fresh wind to blow 'pon un.'

Together they got him to stand up, propped against a hillock near for support. Slowly, with a dazed stare, he looked around, and as his eyes fell on his grand-daughter and Miss Anne he uttered a savage yell.

''Tis there—out there he is!' he cried, his hoarse voice sounding above wind and wave, 'your precious Cap'en—drownded like a dog—sent by your sweetheart down to hell below. Oh, but I envies him the deed!' And he lifted up his trembling hands, while his wolfish eyes strained themselves on the boat afar.

But already Loyalty held him by the collar. With a rough shake, as if to bring his senses back, she said: 'What devil's in 'ee now, to make 'ee talk like this? Miss Anne, don't 'ee heed un, please. 'Tis his vicious-mindedness. He's clean gone mazed, and fancies that what he's wishin', he sees.'

'Mazed!' he yelled, turning round on her with the fury of a tiger; 'mazed, is I?—when I had ye tracked? "Baker's Place, Richmond Walk. Get the rids o' Roger." Ha, ha! 'twas *he* to turn mazed. *He* watched ye. *He* seed ye. *He* knowed what you was after. I had the paper writ and give to un; and all the day long he played the spy, while you went dallyin' with your mother's murderer.'

Loyalty uttered a wail of despair, while Mrs. Coode, catching her by the two arms, cried, 'Is it true? Is it true?' and Anne fell back, fixing on the girl eyes full of horror.

Dunchy, made deafer than ever by the roaring of the wind and ceaseless beat of the sea, as it dashed against the rocks, to fall on all around in a drenching shower, looked from one to the other in blank dismay.

'What is it?' he said. 'There ain't nothin' more the matter. They'm safe enuf out there. They——' But while the words were still in his mouth a shriek from the other women who had stood watching made them all run to the Cliff's edge; and up rose a tumult of voices—'God help 'em! God save 'em! They'm driftin'. The cable's parted,' mingled with old George's shouts of 'He swore to it! He said he'd overboard with un, brave lad! Well done, Roger.' With the spring of a cat Loyalty was over the little heaped-up wall, and was lowering herself down that spine of slate to the still more jutting out projections below. An instant's scan around and she had scrambled up again.

'Down to Bay,' she shouted in Dunchy's ear, 'to make ready the boat there. They'm bound to drift on to the reef, and then 'tis over.'

The old fellow shook his head in remonstrance.

''Tain't no good,' he said; 'nothin' won't live on that sea. Look to the surf there!' But Loyalty was already flying along; and on either side, urging him to follow her, were Mrs. Coode and Miss Anne,

crying out together: 'They think it's Carleton! My cousin, the Captain!'—'Oh, Dunchy, maybe 'tis Roger—my boy Roger!'

Quick to seize on every straw that gave a chance to those in danger, the rising tide was looked on as a blessing in their favour.

If only the drifting could be prolonged until high water, the little vessel might be carried over the reef, and so on to the less rocky shore beyond. The boat, too, hauled up close to the mill, if needed, when ready, could be run down more easily to the only channel out by which you could take her.

As was feared, the miller and his son were away: only the women were left there. Oh, it was a pitiful sight! Helpless women and two old men—one working willingly with his hands, while shaking his head despondingly; the other raving, cursing, swearing, with all the savage fury of one run mad.

Posted right up the slope from the churchyard to the Cliff's top stood women, who from various points along had seen the disaster, and had hastened to join those they saw running towards the Bay—their eyes fixed on the different paths, they watched for the first approach of the men who they knew were hurrying to the rescue.

Down on the beach below Loyalty and Dunchy were making everything in the boat secure before shoving her down to where she could be launched when help arrived.

Only a word or two had the girl spoken, and that

to Dunchy in explanation. There was no time for talking, it needed all her strength and energy to carry out what she was doing.

That the occupants of the vessel were the Captain and Roger, Dunchy absolutely refused to believe; especially as the only evidence was old Jake; and every now and then he would call out: 'Don't 'ee take on, Miss Anne. Them poor souls out there b'ain't *they*. Roger lift his hand agen the Cap'en! You, Mrs. Coode, bein' his mother, ought to know that could never be he.' And then he would add to Loyalty: 'Now us has the truth 'bout Phœbe Rowe, and what was the meanin' of your bein' cast off for such as she. He'd gone stark starin' mad, through jealous-mindedness. Didn't I allays tell 'ee so? But you wouldn't hearken to me.'

The smile that came into her eyes showed that she was hearkening to him now. The clutch that had held her heart in its icy grip was loosened, the black darkness which had filled her soul was lifted, and the light let in.

It needed all their efforts, and the help of the women standing by, to get the boat down; and then, as near as they dare to the water's edge, they waited.

Beyond, like a bird escaped from its prison, the little craft could be seen bearing down, cutting the water which rose on either side to let her pass on to her destruction. Higher and higher, as they dashed into the Bay, the waves seemed rising; the great

heaps of weed and wrack, scattered, went whirling through the air; the foam, caught by the wind as it swept along, was tossed like snowballs here and there. The women gripped each other tightly; Anne and Mrs. Coode leaned together for support. Dunchy and Loyalty, standing with their hands catching the gunwale of the boat, were swayed backwards and forwards as she rocked to and fro.

Caught in a sheet of water which seemed to curl the vessel up and suck her out of view, the reef was passed! There was a yell of triumph from old George as, keel uppermost, for a moment she came into sight again. The wave broke, and two men appeared, clinging to the blackened rocks, whose broken jagged tops the tide was fast hiding.

'Oh, God, in mercy spare them,' cried Anne. 'Carleton! Carleton! 'tis he!'

Her eye had caught that the nearer of the two had but one arm.

With a quick motion to those nearest to hold on the boat, Loyalty sprang to Anne's side. In her ears the frantic shouting of her grandfather was ringing. Mrs. Coode was imploring the Almighty to send help to her son, and not to let him die before her eyes with the foul slander of murder cast on his good name.

'Miss Anne, listen,' cried the girl, throwing her arms round Anne's neck. 'If so be that anythink should happen, hark, afore I go, to what I say. 'Tis true I went to see the Cap'en; but, in face of God who made me, I did no wrong to Roger in so doin'. He

above knows what took me there, and what 'tis sets a seal upon my lips now.'

Anne clasped her tightly. 'No, no,' she said, 'it couldn't be. You mustn't go; 'twould only mean more lives than two.'

Loyalty shook herself free. Her face, flushed with excitement, seemed to beam with hope and joy.

'Dunchy 'ull go,' she said. 'I know un will. He'll not suffer hisself to stop behind. Dunchy,' she cried, as she caught hold of the boat, 'us is goin' to save 'em, ain't we? You'm comin', too. I knows you be.'

A nod was the old fellow's reply.

The little crowd of women had drawn up close around, the outermost of them struggling with old George, who, striving to reach Loyalty, was calling down vengeance on her head, swearing he'd tear her limb from limb.

'Loyalty,' cried Mrs. Coode, ''tis more than I deserve; but for the sake of he!'—and she held out her arms; and that came to pass which Loyalty had longed for all her life, she was folded to the heart of Roger's mother.

'Now off we goes!' she cried. 'We'll fetch 'em safe, you'll see, and bring 'em back to make all clear as day;' and, her eyes falling on her grandfather, 'Spare th' old man 'mong 'ee; pardon un, Miss Anne. There's more good in un than he ever got the credit for.'

'And Dunchy, you, too,' called out Mrs. Coode,

as the boat, sweeping round, was brought nearer to them again.

'Oh, I's right enough, missis. Don't none of 'ee have no fear for me. If I's got to die, I couldn't do it in better company.'

An instant more and, shot out clear of the land, the two at their oars were labouring with all their strength, while those on shore fell on their knees imploring aid from Him who rules the troubled sea.

And now every breath is held, each heart stands still. They are nearing the reef—they are hidden from view. When the wave bursts what will be seen? The mother shuts her eyes; Anne's face is hidden on the shoulder of a woman near. Again a shout, a pæan of joy!

There is no one clinging to the rock. There are four in the boat now.

Like an echo the shout that is raised comes back, again—again. And from the Cliff near, and beyond, sheer down its face, men are scrambling: the air ringing with the wild 'Hoorays' that rise above the roar of wind and sea.

Mrs. Coode and Anne are clasped in each other's arms. Tears are raining down the faces of those who tell, and those who hear, what Loyalty George and the poor deaf old Dunchy have done. Not a man who listens but wishes she was one of his womankind, and a murmur runs through them as each gives forth his meed of praise. And this they do as they make ready to stand as far as they dare,

out into the surf, to give help to the four now gradually getting closer to the land.

Loyalty and Roger at the oars, Dunchy steering, the Captain holds up his arm every now and again to show that all is right with them.

Each towering wave now drives them nearer to the land; can they but hit the channel with a third one, the boat will be carried into the very midst of the crowd. Down go her bows, to slowly rise again as she rides over each mountain of crested foam, and is left almost touching the shore. Back again the sea draws her, this time to gather up all its force so that the watchers tremble, knowing the shallow water she will be struck in.

Each man standing in the line braces himself, that he may be ready, should they have to fling aside their oars and jump for it, to clutch at them and run them up, before the sea has time to suck them back.

'Ah!——'

A piercing cry tells that the worst has happened. Struck in the stern, the boat has capsized. A rush—a surging to and fro—a wild hurrah!—'They're safe, they're safe!' And then a hush—for all are not there—and, breaking through those around, flinging them aside, Roger is once more in the seething waters, breasting the pitiless waves.

No one asks why. Paralyzed they stand, with faces set, eyes dry, breath held, till, flung at their feet, locked tightly in Roger's arms, lies Loyalty.

CHAPTER XLII

'WHAT is it, eh? Where am I? What's the matter?'

Roger's senses were returning. The loosening of that embrace which had clasped Loyalty so closely to him had roused him back to life again; those who were around him saw that at length he was reviving.

Nearest, on either side, his mother and the Captain were kneeling. Roger caught Carleton Hamlyn by the hand.

'Thank God!' he cried fervently; 'thank God that you are here!' And recollection growing, he added, as he strove to struggle into a sitting position: 'And Loyalty—*Loyalty?* where is she?'

'They'm bringin' her round,' answered a man, just come up, quickly. 'Her's right enough. You bide a bit, Roger, where you be,' and he whispered something into his neighbour's ear; 'the women is doin' for Loyalty.'

'God bless her!' said Roger. 'God in Heaven give her her reward. If it hadn't been for what she did for us, I should have stood a murderer 'fore my Maker's sight.'

Mrs. Coode uttered a groan.

'Ah, mother,' he went on, 'the son of who you was so proud took out his master there, to jump with him overboard.'

'No, no,' cried the Captain. 'Coode, my man,

remember 'twas a promise that all *that* was past and forgotten.'

'It can't never be forgot by me'—and Roger fixed his eyes solemnly upon those around him. 'So long as I'm let to draw the breath of life I shall owe it to Loyalty that I didn't die with the guilt of blood upon my soul.'

A sound of sobbing seemed to find an echo in Roger's sudden fear. He staggered to his feet, pushed aside those who would have kept him back, and, without knowing how he got there, reached the not-far-off crowd, who silently parted to let him pass.

With lips slightly parted, giving a smile to her lovely face, Loyalty lay as if asleep; but one glance showed to Roger that it was that sleep from which she would never awaken.

A dark spot on the white temple told where she had been struck; not by the boat—Roger felt sure of that!—for when from under the wave he caught her in his arms, she had opened her loving eyes and looked at him.

Around, women were weeping, men striving to keep back the tears that still would come. Carleton Hamlyn's face was hidden in his arm; Anne and Mrs. Coode were sobbing bitterly, while poor old Dunchy sat apart, trying to stifle his grief by burying his head in the seaweed near.

Only Roger stood erect and calm, as if the sight he saw had turned him into stone.

Love, joy, hope, happiness, swept away and gone! The sands of life left dry of all, save vain regrets, and the sorrow of days to come. The tenderness he meant to show—the forgiveness he would ask—the forbearance he would crave of her—all had come too late!

Every bitter word he had said to her returned to him; each ungenerous thought he had had passed through his mind.

Oh, would to God she could be brought to life again!

Ah, Roger! no. Her spirit, abiding ever with you, will work that good which in the flesh poor Loyalty never could have done.

Minute after minute now, the crowd would quietly open to let new-comers in. Through the villages the news had spread like wildfire. Hurrying down with others came Mr. Yabsley, Phœbe Rowe, old Lucas, Rozzy Ryder; and not one among them but tried to blot out past uncharitableness by recollecting some kindly action in Loyalty's favour.

The silence once broken, there rose the hum of many voices. Paramount was the whispered question what was to be done with her.

'Pardon, sir,' said old Rowe, addressing Captain Hamlyn; while to rouse Roger he gave him a little

shake of the shoulder, 'but the weather's still looking nasty; and if so be 'twas thought fit to carry her so far, Fairstoke's a bravish step to go. It don't seem to me that there's no call for it, you know,' he added, finding that in the pause he had made no answer had come; 'the old grandfather bein' as he is, it can't be said in a way that she's belongin' to anybody.'

Into the hearts of two men there, a knife seemed plunged.

'She belongs to me,' said Roger, turning fiercely round. 'I had her promise to be my wedded wife, and in God's sight as that I claim her!'

'And she belongs to me,' said Carleton Hamlyn, lifting his head. 'I am her father.'

Involuntarily his eyes fell on Anne, who at the first word had fixed her eyes on him.

'There lies,' he continued, seeming to speak to her, 'the fair fruit of a sin of twenty years ago. She never guessed to whom she owed her birth until I told her myself, near to this very place, a week or more since. Then I offered to own her as my daughter; but she refused, choosing to bear the cruel taunts flung at her rather than betray her poor dead mother's shame.'

Catching his breath as if to keep down the pain this confession caused him, he looked on the faces of those gathered around.

'Now all you here know what has made me a stranger to my home—why that blow was dealt

me which cost Kellow his life, and why I feel his death must for ever lie at my door.'

With the last words his voice all but failed him; his head drooped upon his breast; he stood the picture of grief and despair.

The crowd, stupefied by what they heard, had seemed to shrink back. In an instant Anne had crossed over to his side, had taken his hand and drawn it through her arm.

'Carleton,' she said, 'your daughter's fit resting-place is her father's house. Roger, her promised husband, will feel it best so, and will come, I know, with us to our home.'

She looked at Roger, signing that he should take her place by the Captain's side; then beckoned to Mrs. Coode to lead over Dunchy to her, so that he might walk between them.

Eight unmarried men, privileged by their youth and strength to undertake the task, lifted their lovely burden, and placed her on the rude bier they had provided.

With heads uncovered all stood ready to follow, when Mr. Yabsley signalled them to pause.

'Friends,' said the good minister, 'for a moment lift up your hearts in silent prayer to Him who doeth all things well.'

And a great hush fell on those around. Then, speaking again, he said—

'Man sees the temptations we fall under; God alone sees those we overcome! It is not for us to judge one another. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone."'

In Fairstoke Churchyard there stands—or did a few years since—a hawthorn-tree, which as the spring comes round sheds its white wealth of blossom on the grass grown thick and rank below.

Beneath the grass there lies a stone, on which perchance might still be read two names—

LOYALTY.

ROGER.

'Their love Fear could not conquer, nor Death destroy.'

THE END.

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